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VOLUME FIVE

Voices of Change

VOICES OF ISLAM

Vincent Cornell, General Editor | Omid Safi, Volume Editor

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Voices of Islam

Voices of Islam

Volume 1

Voices of Tradition

Vincent J. Cornell, General Editor and
Volume Editor

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Contents

Voices of Islam — vii
Vincent J. Cornell

Introduction: Islam, Tradition, and Traditionalism — xvii
Vincent J. Cornell

1. Miracle of Sound at the Ka‘ba — 1
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

2. Pillars of Religion and Faith — 5
Karima Diane Alavi

3. Ramadan House Guest — 43
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

4. The Qur’an, the Word of God — 47
Mustansir Mir

5. Drunkenness of the Word — 63
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

6. Encountering the Qur’an: Contexts and Approaches — 65
James Winston Morris

7. Moses and the Saint — 97
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

8. Prophets and Messengers of God — 101
Joseph Lumbard

9. The Loom and The Bridge — 123
Barry C. McDonald

10. The *Sunna*: The Way of the Prophet Muhammad — 125
Hamza Yusuf Hanson

11. Vision of the Shariat 147
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

12. The *Shari'a*: Law as the Way of God 149
Mohammad Hashim Kamali

13. A Man on the Road to God 183
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

14. What Is Sunni Islam? 185
Feisal Abdul Rauf

15. What Is Shiite Islam? 217
Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftary

16. Beginning the Prayer 245
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

17. What Is Sufism? 249
Ahmet T. Karamustafa

Index 271

About the Editor and Contributors 291

Voices of Islam

Vincent J. Cornell

It has long been a truism to say that Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world. However, the situation expressed by this statement is more than a little ironic because Islam is also one of the most studied religions in the world, after Christianity and Judaism. In the quarter of a century since the 1978–1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, hundreds of books on Islam and the Islamic world have appeared in print, including more than a score of introductions to Islam in various European languages. How is one to understand this paradox? Why is it that most Americans and Europeans are still largely uninformed about Islam after so many books about Islam have been published? Even more, how can people still claim to know so little about Islam when Muslims now live in virtually every medium-sized and major community in America and Europe? A visit to a local library or to a national bookstore chain in any American city will reveal numerous titles on Islam and the Muslim world, ranging from journalistic potboilers to academic studies, translations of the Qur'an, and works advocating a variety of points of view from apologetics to predictions of the apocalypse.

The answer to this question is complex, and it would take a book itself to discuss it adequately. More than 28 years have passed since Edward Said wrote his classic study *Orientalism,* and it has been nearly as long since Said critiqued journalistic depictions of Islam in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. When these books first appeared in print, many thought that the ignorance about the Middle East and the Muslim world in the West would finally be dispelled. However, there is little evidence that the public consciousness of Islam and Muslims has been raised to a significant degree in Western countries. Scholars of Islam in American universities still feel the need to humanize Muslims in the eyes of their students. A basic objective of many introductory courses on Islam is to demonstrate that Muslims are rational human beings and that their beliefs are worthy of respect. As Carl W. Ernst observes in the preface to his recent work, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the*

Contemporary World, ''It still amazes me that intelligent people can believe that all Muslims are violent or that all Muslim women are oppressed, when they would never dream of uttering slurs stereotyping much smaller groups such as Jews or blacks. The strength of these negative images of Muslims is remarkable, even though they are not based on personal experience or actual study, but they receive daily reinforcement from the news media and popular culture.''[1]

Such prejudices and misconceptions have only become worse since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. There still remains a need to portray Muslims in all of their human diversity, whether this diversity is based on culture, historical circumstances, economic class, gender, or religious doctrine. Today, Muslims represent nearly one-fourth of the world's population. Although many Americans are aware that Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, most are surprised to learn that half of the Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan. In this sense, Islam is as much an ''Asian'' religion as is Hinduism or Buddhism. The new reality of global Islam strongly contradicts the ''Middle Eastern'' view of Islam held by most Americans. Politically, the United States has been preoccupied with the Middle East for more than half a century. Religiously, however, American Protestantism has been involved in the Middle East for more than 150 years. Thus, it comes as a shock for Americans to learn that only one-fourth of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa and that only one-fifth of Muslims are Arabs. Islam is now as much a worldwide religion as Christianity, with somewhere between 4 and 6 million believers in the United States and approximately 10 million believers in Western Europe. Almost 20 million Muslims live within the borders of the Russian Federation, and nearly a million people of Muslim descent live in the Russian city of St. Petersburg, on the Gulf of Finland.

To think of Islam as monolithic under these circumstances is both wrong and dangerous. The idea that all Muslims are fundamentalists or antidemocratic religious zealots can lead to the fear that dangerous aliens are hiding within Western countries, a fifth column of a civilization that is antithetical to freedom and the liberal way of life. This attitude is often expressed in popular opinion in both the United States and Europe. For example, it can be seen in the ''Letters'' section of the June 7, 2004, edition of *Time* magazine, where a reader writes: ''Now it is time for Muslim clerics to denounce the terrorists or admit that Islam is fighting a war with us—a religious war.''[2] For the author of this letter, Muslim ''clerics'' are not to be trusted, not because they find it hard to believe that pious Muslims would commit outrageous acts of terrorism, but because they secretly hate the West and its values. Clearly, for this reader of *Time,* Islam and the West are at war; however the ''West'' may be defined and wherever ''Islam'' or Muslims are to be found.

Prejudice against Muslim minorities still exists in many countries. In Russia, Muslim restaurateurs from the Caucasus Mountains must call themselves "Georgian" to stay in business. In China, being Muslim by ethnicity is acceptable, but being a Muslim by conviction might get one convicted for antistate activities. In the Balkans, Muslims in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia are called "Turks" and right-wing nationalist parties deny them full ethnic legitimacy as citizens of their countries. In India, over a thousand Muslims were killed in communal riots in Gujarat as recently as 2002. As I write these words, Israel and Hizbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political movement and militia, are engaged in a bloody conflict that has left hundreds of dead and injured on both sides. Although the number of people who have been killed in Lebanon, most of whom are Shiite civilians, is far greater than the number of those killed in Israel, television news reports in the United States do not treat Lebanese and Israeli casualties the same way. While the casualties that are caused by Hizbollah rockets in Israel are depicted as personal tragedies, Lebanese casualties are seldom personalized in this way. The truth is, of course, that all casualties of war are personal tragedies, whether the victims are Lebanese civilians, Israeli civilians, or American soldiers killed or maimed by improvised explosive devices in Iraq. In addition, all civilian deaths in war pose a moral problem, whether they are caused as a consequence of aggression or of retaliation. In many ways, depersonalization can have worse effects than actual hatred. An enemy that is hated must at least be confronted; when innocent victims are reduced to pictures without stories, they are all too easily ignored.

The problem of depersonalization has deeper roots than just individual prejudice. Ironically, the global village created by international news organizations such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News may unintentionally contribute to the problem of devaluing Muslim lives. Depictions of victimhood are often studies in incomprehension: victims speak a language the viewer cannot understand, their shock or rage strips them of their rationality, and their standard of living and mode of dress may appear medieval or even primitive when compared with the dominant cultural forms of modernity. In her classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt pointed out that the ideology of human equality, which is fostered with all good intentions by the international news media, paradoxically contributes to the visibility of difference by confusing equality with sameness. In 99 out of 100 cases, says Arendt, equality "will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is 'normal' if he is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he happens to be different. This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous."[3] According to Arendt, the widespread acceptance of the ideal of social equality after the French Revolution was a major reason why genocide,

whether of Jews in Europe, Tutsis in Rwanda, or Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, has become a characteristically modern phenomenon.

The idea of equality as sameness was not as firmly established in the United States, claimed Arendt, because the ''equal opportunity'' ideology of American liberalism values difference—in the form of imagination, entrepreneurship, and personal initiative—as a token of success.[4] This ideology enabled Jews in America to assert their distinctiveness and eventually to prosper in the twentieth century, and it provides an opportunity for Muslim Americans to assert their distinctiveness and to prosper today. So far, the United States has not engaged in systematic persecution of Muslims and has been relatively free of anti-Muslim prejudice. However, fear and distrust of Muslims among the general public is fostered by images of insurgent attacks and suicide bombings in Iraq, of Al Qaeda atrocities around the globe, and of increasing expressions of anti-Americanism in the Arabic and Islamic media. In addition, some pundits on talk radio, certain fundamentalist religious leaders, and some members of the conservative press and academia fan the flames of prejudice by portraying Islam as inherently intolerant and by portraying Muslims as slaves to tradition and authoritarianism rather than as advocates of reason and freedom of expression. Clearly, there is still a need to demonstrate to the American public that Muslims are rational human beings and that Islam is a religion that is worthy of respect.

Changing public opinion about Islam and Muslims in the United States and Europe will not be easy. The culture critic Guillermo Gomez-Peña has written that as a result of the opening of American borders to non-Europeans in the 1960s, the American myth of the cultural melting pot ''has been replaced by a model that is more germane to the times, that of the *menudo chowder*. According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float.''[5] At the present time, Muslims constitute the most visible ''stubborn chunks'' in the *menudo chowder* of American and European pluralism. Muslims are often seen as the chunks of the *menudo chowder* that most stubbornly refuse to ''melt in.'' To the non-Muslim majoritarian citizen of Western countries, Muslims seem to be the most ''uncivil'' members of civil society. They do not dress like the majority, they do not eat like the majority, they do not drink like the majority, they do not let their women work, they reject the music and cultural values of the majority, and sometimes they even try to opt out of majoritarian legal and economic systems. In Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that left-wing pundits most love to hate. Americans, however, have been more ambivalent about Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, there have been sincere attempts to include Muslims as full partners in civil society. On the other hand, the apparent resistance of some Muslims to ''fit in'' creates a widespread distrust that has had legal ramifications in several notable cases.

A useful way to conceive of the problem that Muslims face as members of civil society—both within Western countries and in the global civil society

Muslim audience better than a Muslim apologist. The scholars Said and Ernst, mentioned above, are both from Christian backgrounds. The discipline of Religious Studies from which Ernst writes has been careful to maintain a nonjudgmental attitude toward non-Christian religions. As heirs to the political and philosophical values of European liberalism, scholars of Religious Studies are typically dogmatic about only one thing: they must practice *epoché* (a Greek word meaning "holding back" or restraining one's beliefs) when approaching the worldview of another religion. In the words of the late Canadian scholar of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, it is not enough to act like "a fly crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl," magisterially observing another's religious practices while remaining distant from the subject. Instead, one must be more engaged in her inquiry and, through imagination and the use of *epoché,* try to find out what it feels like to be a goldfish.[10]

Through the practice of *epoché,* the field of Religious Studies has by now produced two generations of accomplished scholars of Islam in the United States and Canada. Smith himself was a fair and sympathetic Christian scholar of Islam, and his field has been more influential than any other in promoting the study of Islam in the West. However, even Smith was aware that only a goldfish truly knows what it means to be a goldfish. The most that a sympathetic non-Muslim specialist in Islamic studies can do is *describe* Islam from the perspective of a sensitive outsider. Because non-Muslims do not share a personal commitment to the Islamic faith, they are not in the best position to convey a sense of what it means to *be* a Muslim on the inside—to live a Muslim life, to share Muslim values and concerns, and to experience Islam spiritually. In the final analysis, only Muslims can fully bear witness to their own traditions from within.

The five-volume set of *Voices of Islam* is an attempt to meet this need. By bringing together the voices of nearly 50 prominent Muslims from around the world, it aims to present an accurate, comprehensive, and accessible account of Islamic doctrines, practices, and worldviews for a general reader at the senior high school and university undergraduate level. The subjects of the volumes—*Voices of Tradition; Voices of the Spirit; Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society; Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science;* and *Voices of Change*—were selected to provide as wide a depiction as possible of Muslim experiences and ways of knowledge. Taken collectively, the chapters in these volumes provide bridges between formal religion and culture, the present and the past, tradition and change, and spiritual and outward action that can be crossed by readers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims, many times and in a variety of ways. What this set does *not* do is present a magisterial, authoritative vision of an "objectively real" Islam that is juxtaposed against a supposedly inauthentic diversity of individual voices. As the Egyptian-American legal scholar and culture critic Khaled Abou El Fadl has pointed out, whenever Islam is the subject of discourse, the authoritative quickly elides into the authoritarian, irrespective of whether the voice of authority is

Muslim or non-Muslim.[11] The editors of *Voices of Islam* seek to avoid the authoritarian by allowing every voice expressed in the five-volume set to be authoritative, both in terms of individual experience and in terms of the commonalities that Muslims share among themselves.

THE EDITORS

The general editor for *Voices of Islam* is Vincent J. Cornell, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was solicited by Praeger, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing, to formulate this project, he was director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Cornell has been a Sunni Muslim for more than 30 years and is a noted scholar of Islamic thought and history. His most important book, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (1998), was described by a prepublication reviewer as "the most significant study of the Sufi tradition in Islam to have appeared in the last two decades." Besides publishing works on Sufism, Dr. Cornell has also written articles on Islamic law, Islamic theology, and moral and political philosophy. For the past five years, he has been a participant in the Archbishop of Canterbury's "Building Bridges" dialogue of Christian and Muslim theologians. In cooperation with the Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute, he is presently co-convener of a group of Muslim scholars, of whom some are contributors to *Voices of Islam,* which is working toward a new theology of the religious other in Islam. Besides serving as general editor for *Voices of Islam,* Dr. Cornell is also the volume editor for Volume 1, *Voices of Tradition;* Volume 2, *Voices of the Spirit;* and Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science.*

The associate editors for *Voices of Islam* are Omid Safi and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore. Omid Safi is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Safi, the grandson of a noted Iranian Ayatollah, was born in the United States but raised in Iran and has been recognized as an important Muslim voice for moderation and diversity. He gained widespread praise for his edited first book, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003), and was interviewed on CNN, National Public Radio, and other major media outlets. He recently published an important study of Sufi-state relations in premodern Iran, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006). Dr. Safi is the volume editor for Volume 5, *Voices of Change,* which contains chapters by many of the authors represented in his earlier work, *Progressive Muslims.*

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore has been a practicing Sunni Muslim for almost 40 years. She is director of the interfaith publishing houses Fons Vitae and Quinta Essentia and cofounder and trustee of the Islamic Texts Society of Cambridge, England. Some of the most influential families in Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have supported her publishing projects. She is an accomplished lecturer in art history, world religions, and filmmaking and is a founding member of the Thomas Merton Center Foundation. Henry-Blakemore received her BA at Sarah Lawrence College, studied at the American University in Cairo and Al-Azhar University, earned her MA in Education at the University of Michigan, and served as a research fellow at Cambridge University from 1983 to 1990. She is the volume editor for Volume 3, *Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society.*

THE AUTHORS

As stated earlier, *Voices of Islam* seeks to meet the need for Muslims to bear witness to their own traditions by bringing together a diverse collection of Muslim voices from different regions and from different scholarly and professional backgrounds. The voices that speak to the readers about Islam in this set come from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, and include men and women, academics, community and religious leaders, teachers, activists, and business leaders. Some authors were born Muslims and others embraced Islam at various points in their lives. A variety of doctrinal, legal, and cultural positions are also represented, including modernists, traditionalists, legalists, Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis, and ‘‘progressive Muslims.’’ The editors of the set took care to represent as many Muslim points of view as possible, including those that they may disagree with. Although each chapter in the set was designed to provide basic information for the general reader on a particular topic, the authors were encouraged to express their individual voices of opinion and experience whenever possible.

In theoretical terms, *Voices of Islam* treads a fine line between what Paul Veyne has called ‘‘specificity’’ and ‘‘singularity.’’ As both an introduction to Islam and as an expression of Islamic diversity, this set combines historical and commentarial approaches, as well as poetic and narrative accounts of individual experiences. Because of the wide range of subjects that are covered, individualized accounts (the ‘‘singular’’) make up much of the narrative of *Voices of Islam,* but the intent of the work is not to express individuality per se. Rather, the goal is to help the reader understand the varieties of Islamic experience (the ‘‘specific’’) more deeply by finding within their specificity a certain kind of generality.[12]

For Veyne, ‘‘specificity’’ is another way of expressing typicality or the ideal type, a sociological concept that has been a useful tool for investigating complex systems of social organization, thought, or belief. However, the problem with typification is that it may lead to oversimplification, and oversimplification is the handmaiden of the stereotype. Typification can lead to oversimplification because the concept of typicality belongs to a structure of general knowledge that obscures the view of the singular and the different. Thus,

presenting the voices of only preselected "typical Muslims" or "representative Muslims" in a work such as *Voices of Islam* would only aggravate the tendency of many Muslims and non-Muslims to define Islam in a single, essentialized way. When done from without, this can lead to a form of stereotyping that may exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the tendency to see Muslims in ways that they do not see themselves. When done from within, it can lead to a dogmatic fundamentalism (whether liberal or conservative does not matter) that excludes the voices of difference from "real" Islam and fosters a totalitarian approach to religion. Such an emphasis on the legitimacy of representation by Muslims themselves would merely reinforce the ideal of sameness that Arendt decried and enable the overdetermination of the "typical" Muslim from without. For this reason, *Voices of Islam* seeks to strike a balance between specificity and singularity. Not only the chapters in these volumes but also the backgrounds and personal orientations of their authors express Islam as a lived diversity and as a source of multiple wellsprings of knowledge. Through the use of individual voices, this work seeks to save the "singular" from the "typical" by employing the "specific."

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a major figure in the field of Subaltern Studies, notes: "Singularity is a matter of viewing. It comes into being as that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category."[13] For Chakrabarty, the singular is a necessary antidote to the typical because it "defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination."[14] Because the tendency to overdetermine and objectify Islam is central to the continued lack of understanding of Islam by non-Muslims, it is necessary to defy the generalizing impulse by demonstrating that the unity of Islam is not a unity of sameness, but of diversity. Highlighting the singularity of individual Islamic practices and doctrines becomes a means of liberating Islam from the totalizing vision of both religious fundamentalism (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) and secular essentialism. While Islam in theory may be a unity, in both thought and practice this "unity" is in reality a galaxy whose millions of singular stars exist within a universe of multiple perspectives. This is not just a sociological fact, but a theological point as well. For centuries, Muslim theologians have asserted that the Transcendent Unity of God is a mystery that defies the normal rules of logic. To human beings, unity usually implies either singularity or sameness, but with respect to God, Unity is beyond number or comparison.

In historiographical terms, a work that seeks to describe Islam through the voices of individual Muslims is an example of "minority history." However, by allowing the voices of specificity and singularity to enter into a trialogue that includes each other as well as the reader, *Voices of Islam* is also an example of "subaltern history." For Chakrabarty, subaltern narratives "are marginalized not because of any conscious intentions but because they represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional

history."[15] Subaltern narratives do not only belong to socially subordinate or minority groups, but they also belong to underrepresented groups in Western scholarship, even if these groups comprise a billion people as Muslims do. Subaltern narratives resist typification because the realities that they represent do not correspond to the stereotypical. As such, they need to be studied on their own terms. The history of Islam in thought and practice is the product of constant dialogues between the present and the past, internal and external discourses, culture and ideology, and tradition and change. To describe Islam as anything less would be to reduce it to a limited set of descriptive and conceptual categories that can only rob Islam of its diversity and its historical and intellectual depth. The best way to retain a sense of this diversity and depth is to allow Muslim voices to relate their own narratives of Islam's past and present.

NOTES

1. Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), xvii.
2. *Time,* June 7, 2004, 10.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* rev. ed. (San Diego, New York, and London: Harvest Harcourt, 1976), 54.
4. Ibid., 55.
5. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The New World (B)order," *Third Text* 21 (Winter 1992–1993): 74, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 313.
6. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 13.
7. Ibid., 14–15.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, U.K.: Pluto, 1986), 116. The original French term for this condition is *surdéterminé*. See idem, *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 128.
9. Ibid., 112.
10. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7.
11. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 9–85.
12. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology,* trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 56.
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 82.
14. Ibid., 83.
15. Ibid., 101.

Introduction: Islam, Tradition, and Traditionalism

Vincent J. Cornell

"Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."[1] This statement by the historian of Christianity Jaroslav Pelikan sums up the challenge faced by Islam at the beginning of the twenty-first century of the Common Era. It may further be said, as Pelikan added about Christianity, "Traditionalism is what gives tradition a bad name." This has certainly been the case with some kinds of traditionalism in contemporary Islam. Most Muslims would condemn the Taliban of northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan, who reject the intellectual traditions of the Islamic past in the name of a superficial traditionalism that puts more emphasis on tribal custom and the vanities of male self-image—such as kohl-rimmed eyes, henna-dyed beards, and elegant turbans—than on the pursuit of justice or respect for women. Most Muslims would also reject the postmodern traditionalism of Al Qaeda, which combines a nearly wholesale rejection of modern political and social thought with a passionate embrace of the destructive forces of modern technology. The innovative use of technology by Usama bin Laden and his followers stands in stark contrast to their literalistic interpretation of the Qur'an, the ascetic simplicity of their personal lives, and their desire to create an idealized City of God on Earth. Such a utopia has not existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, if it has ever existed at all.

Outside the Muslim world, the belief that Muslims are arch-traditionalists has given Islam a bad name. Recent polls suggest that over 40 percent of Americans have a negative opinion of Islam. In Western Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that secular intellectuals most love to hate. According to this view, the traditionalism of Islam is the main problem. Islamic traditionalism, it is said, leads to the ghettoization of Muslim minorities in Western societies. It leads as well to the rejection of Western political values and the oppression of women. It desires theocracy rather than democracy. Muslims, it is said, are the most uncivil members of civil society. The

negative attitude toward Islamic tradition in contemporary Europe is summed up in the following statement by Jacques Ellul, a right-wing Protestant thinker from France: ''What a wonderfully civilized empire would have been set up if all Europe had been invaded [by Muslims]! This position, the opposite of the prevailing one in history up to about 1950, leads people to forget the horrors of Islam, the dreadful cruelty, the general use of torture, the slavery, and the absolute intolerance notwithstanding zealous apostles who underline Islam's toleration.''[2] In short, for many in the West, the traditions of Islam are fanatical, intolerant, antidemocratic, oppressive of women, and a representation of all the evils of religion that the Enlightenment sought to overcome.

Of course, the aware reader hardly needs to be reminded how unfair Ellul's criticism of Islam is or how easy it would be to apply the same arguments to the history of Christianity. Furthermore, many Muslims in countries such as France, Russia, Germany, Denmark, and Israel would respond that the majority populations of these countries are not civil to them either, even when they try to act as responsible citizens. The road to toleration is a two-way street. School districts in the United States offer civics classes because responsible citizenship needs to be taught to everyone, not just to religious minorities. Being a citizen in a pluralistic society is a skill that is learned, not a characteristic that is present from birth. It is a challenge for democratic societies to maintain the principle of minority rights along with majority rule. This challenge is particularly acute when the rights claimed by minorities are sanctioned by religious beliefs not shared by the majority or when minority traditions go against majoritarian norms. The right for women to cover their hair is just as important for Orthodox Jews as it is for Muslims, and the right to have more than one wife is claimed by Mormon Fundamentalists just as it is claimed by some traditional Muslims. When the state interferes with the free practice of such traditions, issues that normally would remain in the background suddenly take center stage. The relationship between religious minorities and democratic states is characterized by negotiations that constantly pit the demands of tradition against the pluralistic values of modernity. The challenge for religious people today is to remain authentically true to the traditions of the past while recognizing that all human beings now share the ''original sin'' of modernity.

''Tradition demands to be served even when it is not observed.''[3] This further aphorism by Jaroslav Pelikan is particularly apt for Islam and Muslims. One of the most important issues debated by Muslims today is where cultural traditions end and where religion begins. The Qur'an, Islam's Holy Scripture, states, ''Verily, the religion (*din*) of God (*Allah*) is Islam'' (Qur'an 3:19) and ''I have chosen Islam for you as a religion (*din*)'' (Qur'an 5:3). Some observers have taken these verses as a sign of Islam's unique ability to define itself doctrinally and ideologically.[4] However, these verses alone do not tell us what either ''Islam'' or ''religion'' means. *Din* is indeed the

modern Arabic word for "religion." In premodern times, however, *din* meant both more and less than the Western idea of a "church" or an institutionalized religion. The root from which this word comes has four primary significations: (1) mutual obligation, (2) submission or acknowledgment, (3) judicial authority, and (4) natural inclination or tendency. Never, in its premodern connotation, did the term *din* refer to a "system" or to the idea of religion as a subject to be studied in comparison with other subjects called religions.[5] However, two of the classical significations of *din*, mutual obligation and judicial authority, have social implications. This means that religion in Islam is more than just a personal relationship with God. It also entails a relationship with a community of believers and a society, which necessitates an involvement with culture and tradition. Throughout Islamic history, the traditions of the majority of believers always had to be served, even by those who chose to reject them.

The early chapters in this volume deal with the concept of religion in Islam and its relationship to traditions of personal practice and Qur'anic scholarship. "The *Qur'an*, the Word of God" by Mustansir Mir introduces the reader to the basic scripture of Islam, the only scripture in which every sentence—indeed every word—must be accepted by Muslims as divine truth. For Muslims, the Qur'an is not only the foundation of religious teachings but also the touchstone for religion itself. In "Encountering the Qur'an: Contexts and Approaches," James Winston Morris introduces the reader to the experience of the Qur'an. He shows the non-Muslim reader the different ways by which Muslims traditionally encounter their sacred scripture, and how one can "see," "hear," and ritually enact the Word of God. He does this not only by explaining how the Qur'an can be approached by those who read and recite it, but also by providing a unique guide for non-Muslim and non-Arabic-speaking readers who approach the Qur'an in English. Finally, by demonstrating how the Qur'an has inspired the arts and intellectual life in the Muslim world, he reconnects the idea of religion in Islam to the wider traditions of Islamic expression that are often overlooked in the debate between religion and culture.

The above analysis of the premodern meanings of the word *din* reminds us that the concept of religion in Islam puts a high premium on the idea of reciprocity, which creates both personal and social obligations. The Qur'an tells believers that God "owes" the human being a fair return for her worship. "Who is the one who will lend to God a goodly loan, which God will double to his credit and multiply many times?" (Qur'an 2:245) asks the Holy Book. The Qur'an also reminds believers that a person's "loan" to God is to be paid not only in worship but also in works of charity for other human beings: "Verily, we will ease the path to salvation for the person who gives out of fear of God and testifies to the best. But we will ease the path to damnation for the greedy miser who thinks himself self-sufficient and rejects what is best" (Qur'an 92:5–10). Qur'anic teachings such as these moved the Moroccan

Sufi Abu al-'Abbas al-Sabti (d. 1205 CE) to declare, "Divine grace is stimulated by acts of generosity." For Sabti, each charitable act performed by a human being called forth a response from God that rewarded the giver in proportion to her gift. Sabti, the patron saint of the city of Marrakesh, used this doctrine to encourage the elites of the city to provide charity for the poor.[6] How should the modern reformer of Islam assess a tradition such as this: is it "culture" or is it "religion"?

The idea of reciprocity that leads from the Qur'an to the social ethics of Abu al-'Abbas al-Sabti is an important corollary to the Five Pillars of Islam, which are discussed in Karima Diane Alavi's chapter, "Pillars of Religion and Faith." Alavi's chapter comes first in this volume because for Muslims, the Five Pillars of Islam frame the entire concept of religion, including the divine revelation of the Qur'an. The pillars of religion and faith are also a product of tradition, since they come from a *Hadith* account, discussed by Alavi, in which the Angel Gabriel quizzes the Prophet Muhammad on these subjects. An important part of the tradition of the Hadith of Gabriel is the concept of virtue (*ihsan*). This means, in the words of the *hadith,* "to worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you." The notion of reciprocal awareness that is expressed in this tradition—the human being looks to God as God looks to the human being—is fundamental to the concept of religious obligation in Islam. It is also a bridge to the type of social awareness expressed by the Moroccan Sufi Sabti, for Muslims are accountable to God both for how they fulfill their responsibilities of worship and for how they fulfill their responsibilities toward their brothers and sisters in the family of Adam.

In the Qur'an, accountability to God is expressed as a covenant, in which humanity takes responsibility for the heavens and the earth. This covenant constitutes a major criterion by which faith and actions are judged. Sometimes called "God's covenant" (Qur'an 2:27), it separates Muslim hypocrites and those who assign spiritual or material partners to God from true believers, who maintain their trust in the Qur'anic message (Qur'an 33:73). The person who trusts in God and does not break the covenant in thought, word, or deed is a trustee or vicegerent (*khalifa*) of God on earth (Qur'an 2:30–33). The society that is made up of such individuals is a normative community, one that serves as an example for the world and is a collective witness to the truth (Qur'an 2:143). The Qur'an calls such a community the *Umma Muslima* (Qur'an 2:128), a community of people who submit to God. The word *umma*, which is related to *umm*, "mother," connotes a primary community, literally, a "Mother Community." It implies that all Muslims, wherever they may live, share a common bond that transcends all other ties, from nationality to family. The tradition of being part of this community is as much a part of Islam as are its traditions of worship.

The leading members of the universal *Umma Muslima* are the Prophets of Islam, who are discussed in Joseph Lumbard's chapter, "Prophets and

Messengers of God." According to Lumbard, God's Prophets are the keepers of the promises and signs (*ayat*) of God. They are bearers of the divine message and reminders to countries and peoples of humanity's obligations to God and to each other. Because all Prophets serve the same function and transmit the same general message, all of them are Muslims, even if they are revered by the followers of other religions, such as Jews and Christians. Starting with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad, they form a single holy community that represents the continuity of tradition in what scholars of comparative religion call the "Abrahamic Faiths."

The collective tradition of the Prophets of Islam forms the background of the *Sunna*, the model of religious and ethical practice established by the Prophet Muhammad. Hamza Yusuf Hanson's chapter on the Sunna is called "*The Sunna*: the Way of Muhammad." However, it is understood by Muslims that the values the Prophet Muhammad's way of life promoted are the same as those of the other Prophets of Islam. Thus, the Sunna of Muhammad, the last Prophet, is also the Sunna of the previous Prophets, just as the message of the Qur'an is the same as the message of all previous revelations. The Sunna is also the basis for the second type of scripture in Islam, the collections of traditions of the Prophet Muhammad known as *Hadith*. The acceptance of a particular Hadith account is not an article of faith in Islam as is the acceptance of a verse of the Qur'an. However, taken collectively, the Sunna has become an authoritative teaching on par with the Qur'an in the eyes of many Muslims.

The Sunna as a model for Islamic practice was developed in the community created around the Prophet Muhammad in Medina between the years 622 and 632 CE. The practice of this community also established the foundations for "The *Shari'a*: Law as the Way of God," which is the title of the chapter by Mohammad Hashim Kamali. As Kamali explains, when Muslim jurists looked to the Hadith for sources on Islamic law and ethics, they found that some accounts elucidated religious precepts, while others dealt with customary behaviors such as matters of personal hygiene and etiquette. Modern scholars of the Sunna look at these traditions to decide which are part of "religion," and hence obligatory, and which are part of "culture," and hence optional. Premodern jurists asked similar questions, although without the modern concern for the concept of culture. They developed the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to determine how to integrate the Qur'an and the Sunna into the social and religious life of the Muslim community.

The final chapters in this volume trace the historical development of three major Islamic traditions that developed out of the teachings of the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the early history of the Islamic community. The most important development of this period was the separation of the Muslim *Umma* into separate communities over the issue of leadership after the Prophet Muhammad and over who—the leader of the community, the community itself, or a special class of scholars—has authority over the interpretation of the Qur'an

and the Sunna. These issues are detailed in the chapters, ''What Is Sunni Islam?'' by Feisal Abdul Rauf, and ''What Is Shiite Islam?'' by Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftary. Both these chapters take the question of tradition into political, juridical, and theological dimensions that relate to present-day concerns, such as the tension between Sunni and Shiite communities in modern Iraq. Each chapter is unique in its own way. Abdul Rauf's chapter on Sunni Islam focuses discussion on the technical term for the Sunnis, *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamaʿa*, and details how the concept of Sunni Islam was based on the authority of the collective opinion of the community and the jurists (the meaning of *al-Jamaʿa*). The chapter on Shiite Islam by Nanji and Daftary is unique in that it devotes more space than usual to a discussion of Ismaili Shiʿism. Although the Ismailis are a minority among today's Shiites, they were the majority for more than two centuries and created the only major Shiite state until the rise of Safavid Iran in the early sixteenth century. Finally, ''What is Sufism?'' by Ahmet T. Karamustafa recounts the development of the most important nonsectarian tradition in Islam today, *tasawwuf*, which is often described as ''Islamic mysticism.'' Karamustafa's chapter is an important corrective to those who overemphasize the ''mystical'' aspect of Sufism. In particular, he traces Sufism's origins to early Muslim traditions of renunciation and the desire to explore the inner dimensions of faith and the human personality.

The chapters in this volume are called *Voices of Tradition* because they not only introduce the reader to some of the most important traditions of Islam but also provide a glimpse of how Muslims engage tradition in their life and experience. The authors of these chapters originate or live in regions that span the world of global Islam: Afghanistan, East Africa, Egypt, Malaysia, South Asia, Turkey, and the United States. They are scholars, jurists, imams, government officials, community activists, and poets. All speak from years of experience with the traditions about which they write. Abu Madyan (d. 1198), one of the greatest teachers of the Sufi tradition of Islamic Spain and North Africa, said: ''The Qur'an is a divine inspiration and a revelation, both of which remain until the Day of Judgment.''[7] Each of the chapters in this volume details how the Word of God is manifested across time in the foundational and historical traditions of Islam. Abu Madyan also said: ''The truth is on the tongues of the scholars of every generation, according to the needs of the people of their time.''[8]

Each of the chapters in this volume was written with two audiences in mind. The primary audience is the non-Muslim reader, who will use this volume as a sourcebook for the traditions of Islam and for school assignments, background information, or general knowledge. However, another important audience for this volume is the Muslim reader, especially the young Muslim, who can use the information provided in these pages by internationally recognized Muslim scholars to present an alternate voice or even a corrective to the information that may be given in mosques and Islamic centers. Finally,

the voices of Islam in the present volume, as in the volumes that follow, provide answers to two questions that have been often asked since September 11, 2001: Where are the Muslim voices that speak out against extremism? Where are the Muslim voices that speak for the traditions that made Islam a world religion and gave birth to a major civilization?

NOTES

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

2. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 96, n. 3.

3. Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 70.

4. See, for example, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 80–82.

5. The idea of Islam as a system (Ar. *nizam*) appears to have come from South Asia around the time of the Second World War. In 1943, Mawlana Hamid al-Ansari Ghazi used the term to refer to Islam as a political system. In 1942, the modernist reformer Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) used the Urdu term *Islami nizam* (Islamic system) in a speech about Islamic ideology. The concept was later popularized in the Arab world through the works of the Muslim Brotherhood activist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966). Ibid, 274, n. 10.

6. On Sabti, see Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998), 79–92.

7. Vincent J. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Aby Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ansari (509/1115-16— 594/1198)* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 116.

8. Ibid., 118.

1

Miracle of Sound at the Ka‘ba

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

What sounds are heard around God’s House?

First, utter silence, silence within silence. Then
  its echo,
more silent still.

A silence that sits deep under the Throne of God—
all other silence surrounds it and
    slowly turns.

Every other silence partakes of that silence. Silence in
eyes, silence in tongues, silence in the
  womb, the silence of death.

The Ka‘ba sits in the
shaft of that silence from the height of heaven,
and generates silence.

Then, just around this great circle of silence
the sound of an ocean, not of water or salt,
but of human longing, aswirl with
  sound, slow roar, slow-motion crash of
    surf, suspended animation of all
tremendous sounds in creation, the
exhalation of giant beasts, outbreath of
earth as God created caves and
sea depths and

seismic shifts.

Then more distinctly,
articulating what shines through both
  silence and sound,
the Word of God,
that aural text that floats from the
Heart of Light into the hearts of mankind,
tongue-tripped into articulate words, formed and
  filled with breath,
flowing like the sea, but from
    sea-depths of meaning,
light to the eyes and
sweet relief to the heart.

Then out from that circle,
the sound of all human speech, words of
  admonition, snatches of
    conversation, starlight of
God's Compassion sprinkled throughout it,
Turkish bursts, Arabic stutter, a child's distant cry,
then roar again, sea-surf,
  silence,
silence above all, and the
  twelve-dimensional
    echo of that silence.
Then a phrase of Urdu, Afghani, Malay,
low rumble of
Qur'an recitation, pauses, people
  looking around, metallic
    clatter from far away, the
rhythmic supplications of a group of pilgrims
    circling God's House.

Then the click sound of a microphone in sonic superspace
      turning on.

Then words enveloped by the Word,

the Word enveloped in a roar,

the roar enveloped in silence,

the articulate silence of God, then

the silence of silence.

Then the echo of that silence.

Then the looking around.

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Timewarp*. Reprinted here from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

2

Pillars of Religion and Faith

Karima Diane Alavi

> Proclaim! (or Read!)
> In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created—
> Created the human being out of a clot of blood.
> Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful—
> He who taught by the Pen—
> Taught the human being that which he knew not.
>
> (Qur'an 96:1–5)

Like many Muslims, I am often called upon to speak about Islam at churches, synagogues, and schools. Part of my job at a New Mexico Islamic educational center is to present workshops about our religion at schools and conferences. I enjoy meeting people from across the country, and many of my encounters have been poignant, like the time a Jewish boy reached into his pocket and handed me a bunch of half-melted M&M's after my presentation on Ramadan. "I know you cannot eat these for lunch," he whispered. "But once you're done fasting today, you can have these for dessert and think of me." Though I never ate one of those mashed-up candies, I often think of him.

With the increase of immigrant and U.S.-born Muslims in American communities, I have encountered both teachers and students who can list the Five Pillars of Islam with ease. They have studied them—in terms of what Muslims *do*—but most have not taken the next step, which is asking what Muslims *believe*. In other words, what are the reasons behind the Five Pillars, and are there other foundational beliefs within Islam that go beyond the pillars? How can non-Muslims avoid reducing their impression of Islam to these Five Pillars? This chapter not only covers the Five Pillars of Islam and the Articles of Faith but also touches upon other elements of Islam that are not considered pillars but are nonetheless essential aspects of a Muslim worldview and important criteria for living one's life the way a pious Muslim should. These include things such as harboring a deep reverence for nature, reflecting on the signs of

God's mercy and power through contemplating the amazing world around us, and walking the earth in a spirit of humility and grace.

THE CONCEPTS OF ISLAM AND RELIGION

Before we can begin to explore Islam's Pillars and Articles of Faith, it is first necessary to take a deeper look at the Arabic language in order to give more meaning to some of the terms many people are already familiar with. The word *Islam* itself is the best one to begin with. Almost all Arabic words are based on a three-consonant root that is shared with other words that have a related meaning. There are a small number of words with a four- or five-letter root, but the three-letter linguistic pattern is predominant. The three-letter root for the word *Islam* is S-L-M. Other words in Arabic that share the same root have the meanings of "peace," "submission," "security," "sincerity," and "safety." The inference here is that one who submits to the will of God is at peace, but one who is in constant conflict with God's will and the world around her is destined to live a life filled with tension and agitation, as if something is missing; for Muslims, what is missing are faith and serenity.

When Muslims use the expression, "submission to the will of God," it is not a call to fatalism, but rather a reference to the fact that there are many times in a person's life when taking an easy path is tempting, and following the dictates of a religion can be demanding. A devout Muslim submits to God's injunctions without challenging or questioning them, while trying to understand their inner meanings. A good example is the fasting month of Ramadan. For a Muslim, this is a time when getting out of bed even earlier than usual, in order to eat before dawn, can be a challenge. Of course for most people, staying in bed and curling up under their blankets in the morning is far more appealing than getting up to eat and pray, and not every Muslim has the willpower to actually pull those blankets off and get moving. Yet those who do, soon discover that Ramadan is a time of joy as well as hardship. It is a time when people renew their commitment to their faith and reconnect with the Muslims in their community, perhaps some whom they have not seen for a long time. What was initially a hardship soon comes with ease, and those who succeed in their Ramadan efforts often exhibit an outer calm that reflects their inner peace at knowing that they have heeded the call of their Lord. They have submitted to His will, and it has brought them a feeling of serenity and detachment. The Qur'an describes such people thusly:

> [They] feared God, Most Gracious and unseen
> And brought a heart turned in devotion to Him.
> Enter ye therein in peace and security.
> This is a day of eternal life!
>
> (Qur'an 50:33–34)

Religiously speaking, a *Muslim* is not simply a follower of the religion of Islam, but also a person who has reached a state of peace through submission to the will of God. This is someone who has obtained *salama,* another term that shares the S-L-M root and means "perfection," "wholeness," and "security." This is a person who is devout in her *din,* or religion. This concept, *din,* also has a linguistic root (D-Y-N) that reveals a deeper meaning of Islamic belief and practice. Meanings of other Arabic words that share this root are "indebted," "requited," "at the disposal of," "judgment," and "brought to account." As we shall see, Islam is a religion that constantly reminds its followers that they owe a debt to their creator, and the Five Pillars of Islam are just one segment of that sacred indebtedness that serves as a daily guide for the truly devout.

THE HADITH OF THE ANGEL GABRIEL

One of the most widely used teaching methods among traditional Islamic scholars is the study of *Hadith,* the recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The primary hadith for teaching the Five Pillars of Islam and the Articles of Faith is referred to as the "Hadith of the Angel Gabriel." Students around the world memorize this tradition and use it as a primary guide to their understanding of Islam. Below is this hadith—which will inform this entire chapter—to demonstrate how such a time-honored teaching tool continues to be useful in the study and practice of Islam:

> ʻUmar ibn al-Khattab said: One day when we were with God's Messenger, (Prophet Muhammad) a man with very white clothing and very black hair came up to us. No mark of travel was visible on him, and none of us recognized him. Sitting down before the Messenger of God, leaning his knees against his, and placing his hands on his thighs, he said, "Tell me, Muhammad, about Islam."
>
> The Messenger of God replied, "Islam means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House (the Kaʻba in Mecca) if you are able to go there."
>
> The man said, "You have spoken the truth." We were surprised at his questioning the Prophet and then declaring that he had spoken the truth. He said, "Now tell me about faith (*iman*)."
>
> The Messenger of God replied, "Faith means that you have faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil."
>
> Remarking that the Prophet had spoken the truth, the man then said, "Now tell me about virtue (*ihsan*)."
>
> The Messenger of God replied, "Virtue means that you should worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you."

> Then the man said, "Tell me about the Hour [of Judgment]."
> The Messenger of God replied, "About that, he who is questioned knows no more than the questioner."
> The man said, "Then tell me about its signs."
> The Messenger of God said, "The slave girl will give birth to her mistress, and you will see the barefoot, the naked, the destitute, and the shepherds vying with each other in constructing tall buildings."
> Then the man went away. After I had waited for a long time, the the Messenger of God said to me, "Do you know who the questioner was, 'Umar?" I replied, "God and His Messenger know best." The Messenger of God said, "He was Gabriel. He came to teach you your religion (*din*)."[1]

In this chapter, I hope (*In sha'Allah*, God willing) to take the reader on the first step of a journey toward understanding the deeper meanings of the Five Pillars of Islam, along with the other aspects of Islam that guide Muslims along their spiritual path. So come along on a joyous *rihla*—an Arabic term that means "journey for the sake of knowledge"—and open up to the various beliefs, books, angels, and prophets that have served as guides for Muslims since the first light of dawn graced our world with its beauty. As the Holy Qur'an says: "Relate the story so that they might reflect upon it" (Qur'an 7:176).

THE FIRST PILLAR OF ISLAM: THE PROCLAMATION OF FAITH (*SHAHADA*)

> There is no god but He:
> That is the witness of God, His angels, and those endowed with knowledge,
> Standing firm in justice. There is no god but He—
> The Exalted in Power, the Wise.
>
> (Qur'an 3:18)

La ilaha illa' llah wa Muhammadun Rasul Allah, "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Muslim fathers traditionally whisper the *Shahada,* the Islamic declaration of faith, into the ears of their newborn children to ensure that commitment to a strict monotheist faith is the first thing they hear. For those who were not born into Islam, stating this declaration out loud in front of witnesses is their first step in conversion to Islam. The three-letter root of the word *Shahada,* SH-H-D, means "to bear witness" or "to testify." In the noun form, it means "testimony" or "that which is witnessed." A *shahid* is one who witnesses. The Qur'an uses the word *Shahada* for one of the titles or names of God: Knower of the Unseen (*al-Ghayb*) and the Seen or Witnessed (*al-Shahada*).

For the Muslim, reciting the Shahada is a verification of what is in the heart, as well as a commitment to follow the Divine Command to worship

our Creator. What is witnessed or testified when one takes this vow to become a Muslim is that this person believes in the reality of one God and agrees to submit to His divine will and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. By pronouncing the Shahada, Muslims also imply their intention to perform the other four pillars of Islam and live their life as a Muslim, to the best of their ability. This is clearly stated in the Hadith of the Angel Gabriel in which Muhammad is asked to discuss the meaning of Islam. The reply begins with, "Islam means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger." Gabriel continues with, "You should perform the ritual prayer, pay the purification tax, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House (the Ka'ba in Mecca) if you are able to go there." All of these five pillars are inherent in the declaration of faith called the Shahada.

When a new Muslim makes this proclamation, it is a joyous occasion that often attracts more than the required two witnesses and that sometimes takes on a partylike atmosphere with food and celebration afterward. From that point on, the new Muslim is a member of the *Umma,* the Community of Muslims. Other Muslims are expected to take the responsibility of offering guidance and advice to new converts and comforting them in times of need, just as one's mother would. This group responsibility is reflected in the fact that the Arabic term for mother, *umm,* shares the same root (U-M-M) as *Umma* or "community."

The Shahada consists of two declarations that are sometimes referred to as the First Shahada and the Second Shahada. The First Shahada, "There is no deity but God," is an expression of *Tawhid,* a concept that means "the oneness or unity of God." Islam stresses monotheism so strictly that God states in the Qur'an—which Muslims believe to be the Word of God—that the only unforgivable sin is the association of other deities with Him.

> God forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him,
> But he forgiveth anything else, to whomever He pleaseth.
> To set up partners with God is to devise a sin most heinous indeed.
>
> (Qur'an 4:48)

Islam's deep commitment to monotheism is evidenced by the fact that the first part of the first Pillar of Islam is the declaration that there is only one God and that He is the only entity that is truly worthy of worship. The concept of divine unity that is inherent in the first part of the Shahada also refers to the believer's indebtedness to the Creator and one's gratitude for God's creation. The concept of unity within the word *tawhid* is a reminder to Muslims that they are part of something so much greater than themselves that it is almost impossible to fathom. When one considers everything that has been created—every human being, every animal, and

every drop of water since the beginning of time—it creates a sense of awe and humility. To worship something other than the One who created everything is an act of arrogance, a sin. Likewise, to deliberately or carelessly harm any part of creation except in self-defense, to mistreat a dog, for example, is also a sin. Part of a person's commitment to living a truly Islamic life is to see the created world as a reflection of Divine Mercy and to be a gentle presence on this planet for the short time that she is here.

According to the Islamic faith, a primary element of primordial human nature is an innate, instinctive awareness of the reality of the one God and an understanding that it is the worship of God that makes one fully human. The Arabic term for this original human nature is *Fitra,* which uses the three-letter root F-T-R. Its related words are *fatara,* "to originate," and *tafattara,* "to be split open or rent asunder," which implies that something has opened up and come forth. The Qur'an states that all of humanity—all descendants of Adam and Eve, past, present, and future—has entered into a covenant with God and have agreed to worship only Him. If they stray from this belief, they have departed from what Islam calls "The Straight Path" (*al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*).

> When your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam and
> From their loins, their descendants,
> And made them testify concerning themselves,
> Saying, "Am I not your Lord who cherishes and sustains you?"
> They said: "Yea! We do so testify!"
> Lest you should say on the Day of Judgment:
> "Of this, we were never mindful."
>
> (Qur'an 7:172)

Muslims are reminded of their covenant with God on a daily basis: the five canonical prayers each include a recitation of the Shahada, as does the call to prayer. By proclaiming the Shahada, Muslims signify that they have joined a tradition of revelation and a spiritual journey that began even before the creation of the first human being on the face of the Earth.

The Second Shahada declares, "Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Revelation is the means by which God has offered guidance to human beings. As previously stated, Muslims revere the Qur'an as the eternal Word of God that was transmitted to all people via the Prophet Muhammad, who was illiterate and did not "write" the Qur'an as some books mistakenly claim. Instead, Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, recited the holy writ of Islam to the Prophet. While Muslims see the First Shahada as a reflection of a universal, cosmic truth—all beings were created to worship their Lord—the Second Shahada is germane specifically to the religion of Islam. Muslims do not assume that members of the other two Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and

Christianity, will view Muhammad as one of their prophets. And yet, inherent in the Muslim declaration of faith is the very seed of the universalism that makes Islam unique. Muhammad is presented to Muslims as the final prophet in a long tradition of divine revelation that includes—but is not limited to—the messages given to former prophets of the Abrahamic tradition. According to the teachings of Islam, God has proclaimed the same basic truth to all peoples of faith: "I am your Lord: worship me and I will offer you mercy, salvation and paradise." The Qur'an clearly points out that this is the same universal message that was sent through the Hebrew and New Testament prophets as well.

> Say, We believe in God and that which was revealed unto us,
> That which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob
> And the tribes, that which Moses and Jesus received,
> And that which other Prophets received from their Lord.
> We make no distinction between any of them
> And unto Him we have surrendered.
>
> (Qur'an 2:136)

This verse reminds Muslims that when they proclaim the Shahada, they also attest to their acceptance not only of the prophecy of Muhammad but also of the long line of prophets that preceded the advent of Islam, as a new faith that sprung up in seventh-century Arabia.

THE SECOND PILLAR OF ISLAM: PRAYER (*SALAT*)

> Those believe in our signs, who—when they are recited to them—
> Fall down in adoration, and celebrate the praises of their Lord,
> Nor are they ever puffed up with pride.
>
> Their limbs forsake their beds of sleep
> While they call upon their Lord in fear and hope:
> And they spend (in charity) out of the sustenance that
> We have bestowed upon them.
>
> (Qur'an 32:15–16)

It is prayer that continuously marks the passing of time for Muslims. Every day opens with prayer, is punctuated throughout by prayer, and ends in prayer. In countries that are predominantly Muslim, it does not take long for a non-Muslim visitor to perceive how the rhythm of daily life is marked by the *Adhan,* the call to prayer. The word for prayer in Arabic is *Salat* and is formed by the three-letter root S-L-A. Another meaning that comes from this root is "blessing."

There is no other aspect of Islamic practice that has been broadcast across the world more often than prayer. This is probably due to the beauty and grandeur that one perceives when witnessing massive numbers of people moving in graceful unison to the melodious sound of Qur'anic recitation. Other scenes, equally touching, depict the opposite: when a person quietly offers herself up to her Creator in solitary prayer, it makes it seem as though all of existence at that moment—at least in that person's heart—is contained in her prayer rug.

While the first Pillar of Islam, the Shahada or Proclamation of Faith, can be performed publicly with a minimum of two witnesses, prayer extends a Muslim's religious practice into the community. It is considered best to pray in congregation whenever possible, and according to some schools of Islamic law, it is incumbent upon males to pray together on Fridays. Women are permitted to pray in the mosque too, but they also reserve the right to pray at home if they prefer to do so.

The formal prayers of Islam are basically the same around the world. This means that a Muslim can join in prayer from Demak in Indonesia to Detroit in the United States and move right into the flow of the Salat without missing a beat. Before the prayer begins, Muslims must make sure that they, and the place where they pray, are ritually pure. Things that make a person or a place impure are any human or animal excretion, such as blood or urine. Menstruating women do not pray, and according to some schools of Islamic law, people with seeping or bleeding sores cannot perform the ritual prayers because those who are bleeding are considered impure, regardless of gender. People who are too sick to participate in the physical movements of the formal prayers are required to pray while sitting or even lying down if they are able to do so. However, one must be clear of mind while praying, so a person using strong medication that affects one's mental capacities can be excused from prayer.

Before the prayer Muslims perform *wudu'*, an ablution that consists of cleaning the hands, mouth, nose, arms, face, head, ears, and feet. To an outsider, this act of ritual cleaning may seem like nothing more than an empty physical activity, but to the Muslim there is a spiritual significance to this practice as well. Often, prayers are silently recited while seeking a state of purity, and certain inner reflections are expected to accompany the act of making ablutions. For example, I am expected to consider my speech while washing my mouth, being mindful of whether I have used the faculty of speech to do good or evil since the last prayer. The same is done with the rest of their body; did my feet take me to places that are acceptable, places where God's work is done? Did my hands participate in actions that harm or help the rest of God's creation? In this way, the physical purity of my bodily members becomes a reflection of the inner, spiritual purity toward which I must strive at all times.

After cleaning themselves, Muslims line up shoulder to shoulder following the instructions of a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad stated that when Muslims allow gaps between themselves in lines of prayer, the one

who slips between the lines is Satan. The Muslim prayer is made up of cycles of repeated movements called *raka'at*. Each *rak'a* or cycle consists of standing straight, bending at the waist with hands on the knees, standing straight again, lowering oneself into prostration, rising to a kneeling position, and then prostrating a second time. Some scholars believe that the positions of the human body while performing the Muslim prayer take on the shapes of the Arabic letters that spell the word "Allah."

Every Muslim must pray five times a day: (1) in the morning just before dawn, (2) when the sun is at the midpoint in the sky, (3) in the afternoon when the sun is halfway between the midpoint and sunset, (4) just after sunset, and (5) in the evening at least an hour and a half after sunset. The number of *raka'at* for each of the five daily prayers has been set at two in the morning prayer, four in the midday prayer, four in the afternoon prayer, three in the sunset prayer, and four in the evening prayer. This means that a Muslim has her face to the ground a minimum of 17 times a day, bringing to mind God's injunction to submit to Him in a spirit of humility and gratitude. Prayers are often performed in a mosque—*masjid* in Arabic—a term that means "place of prostration." It is this position of total prostration—with feet, knees, hands, and face on the ground—that is described by most Muslims as their favorite part of the ritual prayer, affirming the notion that their lowest, most humble physical position leads them to their highest spiritual point.

The verbal portion of the prayers, whether done out loud or in silence, shares elements that are the same across different sects and schools. Each *rak'a* begins with the recitation of *Surat al-Fatiha,* "The Opening," which is the seven-line opening chapter of the Qur'an. This is followed by recitation of other Qur'anic verses. Some segments of the prayers are done out loud, and some are done in silence. People often follow the group prayer with a silent prayer of supplication called *du'a*.

That fact that males and females are separated during the prayer sometimes draws criticism from outsiders who have failed to consider the extremely physical nature of Muslim prayer. During the prayer, our bodies rub against the people standing next to us. When in prostration, we are often in a position that may be considered immodest. Islam is a religion that recognizes human nature and deals with it in a direct manner. For this reason, the distractions that might arise by mixing genders in such close proximity that they are touching each other's bodies during prayer is avoided by separating males and females.

It is interesting to note how *harim,* the word for the women's section of a mosque or a home, has taken on a connotation in the West that is the opposite of the original meaning of the word. When non-Muslims hear the word "harem," they often conjure up Hollywood images of scantily clad women waiting to fulfill the desires of a powerful male, usually in some remote desert oasis. However, the true meaning of *harim* is "holy place," "sanctuary," or "asylum." Related forms of this word mean "to make sacred," "prohibited,"

"forbidden," or "holy." In other words, the women's section of a mosque or a home is considered so sacred that it is forbidden territory. To whom is it forbidden? In the home, the *harim* is forbidden to outsiders. In the mosque, the *harim* is forbidden to men. Non-Muslims usually fail to see that Muslim women often enjoy their private, sacred space. Many women do not want to lose the sense of sanctuary that offers such privacy. Some Muslim women are currently trying to integrate genders within the mosque, particularly in the United States. But interestingly, objections to this movement are often just as loud from their female co-religionists as it is from the males.

When the prayer is over, Muslims extend greetings to the right and left (or according to some schools of law, just to the right if no one is to the left). This extends greetings of peace to their coworshippers. But it is also done in recognition of the Qur'anic verse (Qur'an 50:17) that tells Muslims to behold the two Guardian Angels that accompany them at all times. The angel to the right notes one's good deeds, and the angel to the left notes one's bad deeds. By extending greetings to each of these unseen angels, Muslims are reminded to consider the sanctity of their thoughts, speech, and actions throughout their daily activities. In this way, prayer is the ultimate reminder of the interweaving of the divine and angelic worlds with earthly existence.

The Qur'an does not describe how to practice the five daily prayers. Islamic tradition states that it was the Angel Gabriel who taught the Prophet Muhammad how to do the prayers so that he could pass that knowledge on to his followers. Another popular tradition that is often depicted in Persian miniature paintings describes the event in Muhammad's life called the Ascension (*Mi'raj*). It was this sacred journey to heaven that led to the number of daily prayers being set at five.

One evening the Angel Gabriel awakened the Prophet Muhammad and mounted him on a winged creature similar to a horse named Buraq (from the Arabic word for "lightning"). Within a short time Buraq whisked the prophet from Arabia to Solomon's temple at Jerusalem, which the Qur'an refers to as "The Farthest Mosque" (*al-Masjid al-Aqsa*) to indicate its distance from Mecca. The prophet ascended through the seven heavens to the very Throne of God. As he passed through the various stages of heaven, he encountered other prophets such as Jesus, Adam, and Abraham. At the final moment before meeting God, the Angel Gabriel told Muhammad that he would have to continue alone because the power and majesty of God's light would burn Gabriel's wings. Muhammad went on alone and received instructions from God for his *Umma,* the Muslim Community.

Muhammad began his return to the earthly realm, but on the way, he encountered Moses who asked what acts of worship were required of Muhammad's followers. Muhammad replied that his people were to pray to God 50 times a day. Moses insisted that human beings would never follow through on such a difficult requirement and told Muhammad to go back and ask for the load to be lightened. He returned to God and the number

of prayers was reduced to 40. According to the Prophet's story, "I went back, and when God had reduced the prayers by ten, I returned to Moses. Moses said the same as before, so I went back, and when God reduced the prayers by ten more, I returned to Moses."[2] After multiple entreaties to God, Muhammad was finally too embarrassed to return again, and thus the final number of prayers was set at five. For the most pious Muslims, these five prayers are seen as a minimum. Muslims often follow the required prayers with extra *raka'at,* as the Prophet Muhammad and his companions did.

There are numerous Qur'anic verses that refer to God's command that believers remember Him through prayer, but perhaps the best known are the following:

> Establish regular prayers at the sun's decline
> Till the darkness of the night,
> And the Morning Prayer and recitation; for the prayer and recitation in the morning
> Carry their testimony.
>
> And pray in the small hours of the morning.
> It would be an additional prayer (or spiritual profit) for thee;
> Soon will thy Lord raise thee to a Station of Praise and Glory!
>
> (Qur'an 17:78–79)

The Morning Prayer is singled out as special because of the belief in Islam that early morning is a particularly spiritual time, when dawn has arrived and the soul of the believer is awakening from the evening's rest. The above Qur'anic comment about the extra prayers in "the small hours of the morning" is assumed to be a reference to prayers that the Prophet Muhammad performed after midnight and into the morning hours.

God makes it clear in the Qur'an that humans are not the only aspect of His creation that glorify Him through prayer. The Qur'an also states that all beings praise their Creator simply by doing what comes naturally to them:

> Do you not see that it is God whose praises all beings
> In the heavens and on earth celebrate,
> And the birds (of the air) with wings outspread?
> Each one knows its own mode of prayer and praise
> And God knows well all that they do.
>
> (Qur'an 24:41)

If one reflects upon all of the prayers taking place—with millions of Muslims praying at least five times a day—it soon becomes clear that there

are concentric rings of prayers circling our world at all times. As the sun moves slowly across the surface of the Earth, someone at each moment is doing her morning prayers, just as someone else is following the evening shadow that just covered her world, by offering up her nighttime prayers. Though most people are not consciously aware of it, these consecutive rings of prayers toward Mecca never stop.

Each mosque around the world has some sort of indicator for the direction of prayers. This may be something as elaborate as a tall niche covered with turquoise tiles and Qur'anic verses, or it can be the word "Allah" scratched into the wall of a simple adobe structure to indicate the *Qibla,* the direction of prayer. Most people are aware that Muslims around the world face toward Mecca as they perform their five daily prayers. However, it is not the city itself that draws the prayers; it is the *Ka'ba* or sanctuary at the center of the Sacred Mosque of Islam that is the focus of these prayers.

Muslims originally faced toward Jerusalem when they prayed, reflecting Islam's close kinship with the earlier revelations of Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'an refers to the Great Mosque in Mecca as "The Sacred Mosque" (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) and to the Great Mosque in Jerusalem as "The Farthest Mosque" (*al-Masjid al-Aqsa*)—the place from where Muhammad ascended to heaven and prayed with the other Abrahamic prophets. The Prophet's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and his ascension through the seven stages of heaven also reflect the universalistic nature of Islam, with its strong ties to the Jewish and Christian revelations. For this reason, Jerusalem continues to be an important city in the hearts and minds of Muslims.

In the earliest days of Islam, there were no "instructions" or revelations from God informing Muhammad about the direction of the prayers, but 16 months after Muhammad and his early followers had fled Mecca for Medina, a revelatory verse came forth, finally determining that the Muslims should pray toward the Ka'ba that sits at the center of the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. The *Qibla*, the direction of prayer toward the Ka'ba, reminds Muslims that Islam is not a "new" religion. It is a return to the earliest roots of human piety. Islamic tradition credits Adam as the first person to have built a shrine at this site. The structure is empty and serves as a symbolic link between monotheism and the recognition of God's omnipresence in all of creation. During a time when shrines were filled with pagan idols, the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael rebuilt the Ka'ba to serve as the house of worship dedicated to the One God. Since that ancient time, it has continued to be the focal point of millions of Muslims as a reminder of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendents:

> Remember that We made the House a place of assembly for people
> And a place of safety. So take the Station of Abraham
> As a place of prayer; and We covenanted with Abraham and Ishmael,

That they should sanctify my House for those who compass it round,
Or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate (therein in prayer).

(Qur'an 2:125)

THE THIRD PILLAR OF ISLAM: THE PURIFICATION TAX AND CHARITY (*ZAKAT*)

Those who believe, who do deeds of righteousness,
And establish regular prayers and regular charity,
Will have their reward with their Lord.
On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

(Qur'an 2:277)

Zakat, the requirement of charity in Islam, is often translated as "Alms Tax," but there are several important nuances to the meaning of this word. The three-letter root of *Zakat* is Z-K-A. To give *Zakat* means, "to give charity," but more importantly, it also means, "to purify." This deeper meaning of the word refers to the Qur'anic injunctions against arrogance and the hoarding of wealth, and to remember that all things we own come from God and will return to God, including our souls. By sharing our worldly possessions with others, we purify ourselves of the arrogance of thinking that these blessings are simply the result of our efforts rather than the grace of God.

The rules for calculating Zakat are complex and depend upon the nature of one's wealth and the way in which it was acquired; a person's mandatory Zakat can range from 2.5 to 10 percent. The Qur'an lists the eight categories of people who have the right to receive Zakat: (1) the needy, (2) the poor, (3) those who collect the Zakat, (4) those whose hearts are to be reconciled to Islam, (5) captives who need to be ransomed, (6) those who are in debt, (7) those who fight in God's path, and (8) travelers. Today there are many Muslim charitable organizations that collect Zakat and dispense it to needy people around the world.

Giving alms is really a way of giving thanks to God for the benefits received, both by sharing them and by using them to perform good deeds that will benefit others. Even good health is considered a benefit received from God. Using the body to do good works is also considered Zakat, so that speaking sympathetic words or using one's body to perform acts of kindness are considered to be acts of charity. In this respect, health is a blessing for which every limb "pays alms." Thus, giving charity does not always assume the passing on of money or material goods. Even poor people can be charitable to others, as the Prophet Muhammad made clear:

> The Prophet said: "Charity is a necessity for every Muslim." He was asked: "What if a person has nothing?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity." The Companions asked: "What if he is not able to work?" The Prophet said: "He should help poor and needy people." The Companions further asked, "What if he cannot do even that?" The Prophet said: "He should urge others to do good." The Companions said: "What if he lacks that also?" The Prophet said: "He should prevent himself from doing evil. That is also charity."[3]

The Prophet Muhammad once listed those people who will be comforted by the "Shade of God" on Judgment Day. Among them, he mentioned "the person who practices charity so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given."[4] This comment refers to the fact that Muslims are supposed to give charity in the subtlest manner possible and not draw undue attention to their good works by making them known to others; in fact, drawing attention to one's acts of charity is worse than not doing any charity at all. This is stated clearly in the Qur'an: "Oh ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity" (Qur'an 2:264). A Qur'anic parable follows this admonition, likening the person who brags about her charitable deeds to a barren rock that cannot bring forth anything live and green, even after a heavy rain. On the other hand, those who are quietly generous and spend their earnings in the Way of God are said to have souls like a fertile garden that springs forth with life, even after the slightest rain (Qur'an 2:265).

While Zakat is a mandatory Purification Tax included in the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslims often go beyond this minimum requirement and give additional voluntary charity that is called *Sadaqa*. The three-letter root of this word, S-D-Q, also means, "to speak the truth," "to be sincere," and "to fulfill one's promise." All of these aspects of honorable behavior indicate the links between generosity and a healthy society. Hence, there is an emphasis in Islam on weaving together the concept of charity and the sincerity of one's faith. This interconnectedness is expressed in the Qur'anic verse that defines true piety as spending one's substance on such things as the support of orphans, the ransom of those in bondage, and the fulfillment of contracts (Qur'an 2:177).

The issue of whether it is better to give than to receive has woven its way through many religious traditions. In Acts 20:35 Jesus is quoted as saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." There are several Hadith that quote the Prophet Muhammad affirming the same religious truth. Perhaps the most familiar story is that of Hakim ibn Hazm, a wealthy man who became a Muslim and a close companion of the Prophet. The story of ibn Hazm's love for worldly goods and the gentle lesson the Prophet taught this new Muslim is still used as a teaching tool to encourage discussion on the issue of charity.

Although Hakim was generous in his spending for the sake of God, he still liked to have much. After the battle of Hunayn, he asked the Prophet for some of the booty that the Prophet was distributing among the believers. He then asked for more and the Prophet gave him more. Hakim was still a newcomer to Islam and the Prophet was more generous to newcomers so as to reconcile their hearts to Islam. Hakim ended up with a large share of the booty. Then the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him: "O Hakim! This wealth is indeed sweet and attractive. Whoever takes it and is satisfied will be blessed by it but whoever takes it out of greed will not be blessed. He would be like someone who eats and is not satisfied. The upper hand is better than the lower hand" (that is, it is better to give than to receive). These kind words of advice had a deep and immediate effect on Hakim. He was mortified and said to the Prophet, "O Messenger of God! By Him who has sent you with the truth, I shall not ask anyone after you for anything."[5]

If one imagines two people, one giving a coin and the other receiving it, one is most likely to picture the hand of the giver in a higher position, dropping the coin into the other person's open palm. This imagery has inspired reflection among Islamic scholars on the issue of who has the "upper hand" in a charitable situation. In such situations, feelings of power and superiority often affect us at the subconscious level when we donate money to someone else. Some scholars even went so far as to support the idea that the receiver of *Sadaqa* is actually doing the giver a favor by enabling that individual to perform one of the requirements of his faith. A classic example of such a commentary can be found in the eleventh-century book *Kashf al-Mahjub* (Unveiling the Veiled), by the Persian Sufi 'Ali al-Hujwiri:

> Those in poverty are under a divine compulsion to accept alms, not for their own wants, but for the purpose of relieving a brother Muslim of his obligation. In this case, the receiver of alms, not the giver, has the upper hand; otherwise the words of God, "And He accepts the alms"[6] are meaningless, such that the giver of alms must be superior to the receiver, a belief that is utterly false.[7]

How can this notion manifest itself in daily life? Once I was in Chiang-Mai Thailand during a year when I had not given much Sadaqa. I was thinking about this subject as I joined some tourists in the back of a Tuk-Tuk, a small taxi made out of a motorcycle attached to an open frame with seats and a canopy. After several minutes of weaving in and out of traffic, the engine of the Tuk-Tuk began to sputter and overheat. The driver, in a desperate attempt to get his foreign passengers to their destinations, continued driving until the Tuk-Tuk broke down. He pulled to the side of the busy road just as the engine died. The other passengers of the Tuk-Tuk berated the driver for dropping them off on a crowded sidewalk. They hailed another Tuk-Tuk without paying the confused driver one Baht.

I saw this as a golden opportunity to fulfill one of my religious duties by giving *Sadaqa*. I told my son, who is fluent in Thai, to explain to the driver that I was a Muslim and that I was supposed to give charity as part of my religious practice. We explained to the Tuk-Tuk driver that he would be doing me a favor if he accepted my gift of 30 U.S. dollars, which I hoped he could use to fix his vehicle. By now a crowd had surrounded us out of concern that two foreigners might be giving the man a hard time. Soon people were shaking their heads in disbelief as I thanked the driver for allowing me to perform my religious duty by giving him more than the normal 50-cent fee for his services. In a flush of embarrassment because of all the attention I was drawing, I quickly disappeared into the busy street to hail another Tuk-Tuk.

Wealth is seen in Islam not only as a blessing but also as a test. Those who hoard their wealth and fail to recognize the rights of the needy to a portion of their goods are told that their greed will lead to their own demise and will serve as a cause for their punishment in the afterlife:

> By the Night as it conceals; By the Day as it appears in glory;
> By the mystery of the creation of male and female;
> Verily the ends you strive for are diverse!
> So those who give (in charity) and fear (God),
> And (in all sincerity) testify to that which is moral and just,
> We will indeed make smooth for them the path to bliss.
> But those who are greedy misers and think themselves self-sufficient
> And give lie to the best— We will indeed make smooth for them
> The path to misery!
>
> (Qur'an 92:1–10)

THE FOURTH PILLAR OF ISLAM: THE RAMADAN FAST (*SAWM*)

> Ramadan is the month in which was sent down
> The Qur'an, as a guide for humanity,
> And clear signs for guidance and judgment.
> So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month
> Should spend it in fasting. But if anyone is ill, or on a journey,
> The prescribed period should be made up by days later.
> God intends every facility for you: He does not want to cause you difficulties.
> He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him.
> In that He has guided you; so perchance you shall be grateful.
>
> (Qur'an 2:185)

The Arabic word for fasting is *Sawm,* with the three-letter root S-W-M. The meaning of this root is "to abstain," whether it be from food or even

from speaking. Although there are times throughout the year when believers perform fasts that are not required for all Muslims, the obligatory fast takes place during *Ramadan,* the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, one that follows the phases of the moon. The Qur'an states that the new moons of each lunar month are "signs to mark fixed periods of time" (Qur'an 2:189). This refers to the fact that each lunar month lasts either 29 or 30 days. The lunar year is 11–12 days shorter than a solar year. Thus, when compared to our solar Gregorian calendar, Ramadan moves forward about 11 days each year. If one were to place a solar calendar next to a lunar one, one would see that the dates of the fast move backward; for example, in 2004, most Muslims in the United States began fasting on October 16, but in 2005 the Ramadan fast began on October 5.

According to Islamic tradition, every month begins when the new moon is sighted with the naked eye. This makes determining the first day of Ramadan difficult if the night sky is cloudy. If the clouds are too thick for a moon sighting, then the new month begins after the thirtieth day of the previous month. The motion of the moon around the Earth and the turning of the Earth itself further complicate the determination of the new month. Thus, the new Ramadan moon may be sighted in Saudi Arabia the day before it is sighted in California. Fasting begins at dawn on the morning after the new moon is sighted, but special Ramadan evening prayers start on the evening when the crescent moon is first sighted.

Once the sighting has been officially announced either in the neighborhood, or via radio, television, or Internet, a sense of excitement permeates the Muslim community. People quickly phone friends and relatives to wish them success and blessings during this special month of heightened piety. It is often difficult to sleep that night because of the anticipation of the first day of fasting, yet this is when people need their sleep the most: they will be getting up earlier than usual the next morning to give themselves time to eat a hearty breakfast to sustain them through the day. According to the Qur'an, they must finish their breakfast before the "white thread of dawn" can be distinguished from "its black thread" (Qur'an 2:187). This is about an hour and a half before sunrise. The fast ends for the day at the time of the sunset prayers.

Where I live in New Mexico, the winter sunset can be as early as 5:30 PM, but in the summer it can be as late as 8:30 PM. In a place like Reykjavik, Iceland, however, there can be as little as three hours of darkness in the summer. In mid-June the sun rises at 3:00 AM and does not set until midnight, which means that Icelandic Muslims would have to fast for 21 hours. In the winter, the nights are longer than the days, which would make the fasting period very short. Thus, the Ramadan fast can be easier or more difficult depending upon time and location. Scholars differ about what Muslims should do if they live in an area where the length of darkness or light is extreme. Some suggest that Muslims in far northern climes should follow the times of the day in Mecca,

while others say that they should follow the timing of a city in their region that has a reasonably normal amount of day and night. A few scholars suggest that Muslims should try to complete the fast, no matter how difficult the circumstances, and hope for the greater reward they will receive for their efforts. However, when discussing the fast, the Qur'an states that the purpose of the fast is not hardship: ''God intends every facility for you: He does not want to cause you difficulties. Complete the prescribed period, and glorify Him. In that He has guided you; perchance you shall be grateful'' (Qur'an 2:185).

During Ramadan, those who are fasting must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual activity. Those who are sick, elderly, or traveling are exempt from fasting until a time when they are able to make up the missed days, if they are physically able to do so. Fasting is forbidden for women who are pregnant or menstruating, again with the expectation that they will make up the days later. Those who are physically unable to make up these days should feed a needy person for each day that was missed.

Those who are fasting are expected to carry on with their daily activities rather than spend daylight hours sleeping or relaxing. This makes them more aware of their hunger and fatigue and enables them to reap the benefit of becoming more sympathetic toward those who are hungry the year round because of poverty. For this reason, fasting during Ramadan has a strong social component that links it with the third Pillar of Islam, *Zakat,* or Purification Tax, in that both are meant to develop compassion toward those who are in need of assistance.

Fasting is primarily an exercise in the affirmation of faith and the denial of desires. It is a tradition that has a long history within many faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. In Islam fasting is used to increase and confirm *taqwa* among believers. *Taqwa* can be defined as ''piety,'' ''righteousness,'' or ''God-consciousness.'' A person who has *taqwa* does good deeds for the sake of God, rather than for the sake of her own enjoyment or aggrandizement. For this reason, the patience and perseverance required during the month of Ramadan serves to increase one's *taqwa* and bring the believer to a state of humility, especially when one contemplates how easy it is to fall into the snares of temptation and greed. According to a hadith stated by the Prophet Muhammad:

> God said, ''All the deeds of Adam's descendants are for themselves, except fasting which is for me, and I will give the reward for it.''. . . There are two pleasures for the fasting person, one at the time of breaking his fast, and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord; then he will be pleased because of his fasting.[8]

The Qur'an speaks of *al-Nafs al-Ammara,* the rebellious Ego or the Lower Soul (Qur'an 12:53). This is the carnal self, which is the lowest of the three stages of development of the human soul. The second stage of the soul's development is *al-Nafs al-Lawwama,* the Self-Blaming Soul

(Qur'an 75:2). At this stage, the person feels conscious of evil, asks forgiveness of her sins, and tries to avoid sin in the future. The highest stage of the soul is *al-Nafs al-Mutma'inna,* the Soul at Peace (Qur'an 89:27). At this stage, one achieves peace and serenity through submission of the desires of the Ego to the will of God. The goal of fasting in Islam, as well as in other religious traditions, is to defeat the lower desires of the Ego and attain movement toward the higher Self. Victory over the part of our being that wishes to fulfill our basest desires can lead to inner freedom—a refreshing freedom from desire itself.

This ability to say, "No" to desire is the ultimate goal of the Ramadan fast, but it is also something that should indicate the behavior of the devout Muslim in others areas besides food and drink. We are also supposed to avoid temptations toward things such as unkind speech or selfish acts. One can say that in Ramadan the whole body fasts: the hands "fast" against stealing, the feet "fast" against going where prohibited actions take place, the tongue "fasts" from backbiting, and the eyes "fast" from looking at things in a manner that is displeasing to God. In this way, the person who fasts aspires to bring forth the Godly qualities that are innately present within all human beings.

Ramadan is a month not only of fasting but also of increased prayer, worship, and religious reflection. It is considered a time of self-purification for the believer and a time of cutting oneself off from worldly desires so that the difference between "need" and "greed" can become clear. Because Ramadan is the month during which the revelation of the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad began, it is also considered an especially blessed time. Often evenings are spent in the mosque where one-thirtieth of the Qur'an is recited each night, enabling those in attendance to hear the entire sacred text from beginning to end every Ramadan.

Special prayers called *Tarawih* are recited after the evening prayers, because it was the practice, or *Sunna,* of the Prophet Muhammad. The *Tarawih* prayers are optional and can be performed either at home or in a mosque. The Prophet preferred to recite these prayers at home. However, after Prophet's death, 'Umar, the Second Caliph of Islam, initiated the practice of performing the *Tarawih* prayers in the mosque, when he noticed that there were several small groups doing the prayers separately rather than praying behind a single *imam* or Prayer Leader.[9] The nightly atmosphere within the mosque during Ramadan offers an interesting mix of animated rejoicing and pensive quietude as the pious reflect upon their faith and their lives. The feeling that these nights are very special is supported by a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: "If one establishes prayers during the nights of Ramadan out of sincere faith and hopes to attain God's reward, then all his past sins will be forgiven."[10]

The precise marking of time is crucial in Ramadan and weaves its way through the daily and the monthly activities of those who are fasting.

The final 10 days of Ramadan are considered to have special significance because it is believed that the highly spiritual *Laylat al-Qadr,* or "Night of Power," falls somewhere within this period. The Qur'an states that it was on this blessed night that the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation from God (Qur'an 97:1).[11] During the last part of Ramadan, the Prophet Muhammad used to devote special effort to his worship in the hope of drawing himself nearer to his Creator. For this reason, Muslims often use this time to seek forgiveness for their sins, mend arguments, give extra charity, offer additional prayers—especially for deceased loved ones—and generally aim toward the highest spiritual level they can achieve. Those who are able, sometimes go into a spiritual retreat at this time in the hope of leaving all worldly concerns behind while they focus on things of a religious nature.

Toward the end of each day, as sunset approaches, Muslims prepare for *Iftar,* the breaking of the fast. This is usually a time of gathering with family and friends, so it often takes on an atmosphere of gaiety and anticipation. This is not only because people can eat after sunset but also because of the approach of special evening prayers and Qur'anic recitation. Many years ago, when I lived in Iran, each evening of Ramadan was a celebratory event, and communities used to put up large white lights—similar to Christmas lights—to illuminate the village alleyways that led to the local mosque.

Muslims break the Ramadan fast immediately after sunset, which is defined as when the sun sinks below the horizon. It is not unusual for a large gathering of people to be seated at home or in a café, patiently waiting for the sun to set. After fasting for several days, waiting for sunset becomes a surprisingly easy task, and some people will wait a few moments after the sun has set just to be sure it is permissible to eat and drink. Muslims usually follow the practice of the Prophet Muhammad by drinking water and eating an odd-number of dates when they break their fast. The sunset prayer and then a full meal follow the initial breaking of the fast.

'Id al-Fitr, the "Feast of Fast-Breaking," is the holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. This is a truly joyous occasion that can range from family gatherings to events that draw hundreds or even thousands of people to public celebrations. Children often receive gifts on this day—especially if they have succeeded in their first Ramadan fast, or at least made a sincere attempt to do so—and often street fairs are set up in cities to accommodate large crowds. During the *'Id* celebration in Cairo, amusement parks offer discounts and small mobile rides, such as swings, or small Ferris wheels are scattered throughout the city. Storytellers, puppeteers, and magicians create a carnival atmosphere. Colorful banners sparkle in the sunlight and children ride decorated bicycles through their neighborhoods while ringing their bike bells to announce the end of Ramadan. Smaller towns have a more subdued holiday, with shared meals and special prayers. But whether the gathering is large and noisy or small and tranquil, Muslims around the world share this special

celebration and hope that the piety they gained during Ramadan will remain with them for the rest of the year. As the Prophet Muhammad said: "Make your bellies hungry and your livers thirsty and leave the world alone, so that perchance you may see God with your hearts."[12]

THE FIFTH PILLAR OF ISLAM: THE PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA (*HAJJ*)

> And complete the *Hajj* or *'Umra* in the service of God.
> But if you are prevented [from completing it],
> Send an offering for sacrifice such as you may find.
>
> (Qur'an 2:196)

The final Pillar of Islam is the religious pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*. The three-letter root of this word H-J-J simply means, "to go on a pilgrimage." This journey is incumbent upon all who are physically and financially able to perform it. In a sense, it is the culmination of years of longing and preparation in both religious and economic terms. While there are millions of Muslims around the world who have succeeded in making the pilgrimage, there are millions of others who will go to their graves with the unfulfilled longing to complete the Hajj in their hearts.

The focus of the Hajj is not the city of Mecca, but the Ka'ba, the "House of God" at the center of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. Muslims believe that Adam built a sanctuary on this spot and dedicated it to the worship of the One God; later on, Abraham and his son Ishmael rebuilt it. There is one stone in the contemporary building that is thought to be the only remaining piece of Abraham's original structure. This is the famous Black Stone that worshippers try to touch as they circumambulate the Ka'ba.

For Muslims, the significance of the Ka'ba as a sacred site goes back literally to the beginning of human existence. For this reason, when Muslims perform the rites of the Hajj, there is a sense of joining a long thread of existence that twists through time and space to connect them with ancient rituals and Old Testament prophets. It is a return to the primal source of divine mercy here on earth. Muslims pray five times a day toward Mecca for this very reason. It serves to reinforce their links to God through a long line of prophets and reminds them of the covenant between all of humanity and their creator, in which the descendents of Adam and Eve reaffirm their commitment to dedicate themselves to the worship of God:

> When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam and
> From their loins, their descendants,
> And made them testify concerning themselves,
> Saying, "Am I not your Lord who cherishes and sustains you?"

They said: "Yes! We do so testify!"
Lest you should say on the Day of Judgment:
"Of this, we were never mindful."

(Qur'an 7:172)

Because of their primordial nature, the rites of the Hajj are meant to draw pilgrims out of the present world and into a more sacred space where they can become a link in the cosmic chain that takes them back to the beginning of human existence. The unity of all peoples becomes abundantly evident to pilgrims as they realize that they are surrounded by virtually every language and skin color on earth.[13] This experience is so moving that pilgrims often claim that they feel as though they have participated in a rehearsal for Judgment Day. They become like a drop in the ocean of humanity that is swirling around the Ka'ba at the center of Mecca's Sacred Mosque. It is while circling the Ka'ba that I first became aware of the existence of the rings of Islamic prayer—directed toward this sacred site—that circle our world without stop as they follow the rising and setting of the sun across the planet Earth.

People made pilgrimages to Mecca long before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and the coming of Islam. The city rose out of the desert as an early oasis and a stopping place for merchants and other travelers, where they could buy and sell goods in the active markets that surrounded the Ka'ba. Upon arrival and before departing, they prayed to the clay tribal idols that filled the sanctuary, even though Adam and Abraham had built the structure to be a symbolic "House" for the One God. The Prophet Muhammad entered the sanctuary and destroyed the idols in the year 630 CE.

The Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in the year 570 CE. He was a member of an influential Meccan clan from the Quraysh tribe that controlled Mecca and took in the profits from trade and pilgrimage to the Ka'ba. When the revelation of Islam came to Muhammad, the Quraysh were afraid that these profits would be threatened by a monotheistic faith that forbids idol worship: at that time, there were 360 tribal idols in the Ka'ba and the pilgrims that worshipped them served as Mecca's primary source of wealth. Because they threatened the source of livelihood for the Quraysh, the early Muslims were persecuted, tortured, and even killed. Despite this, the small group of the Prophet's followers grew in size. Eventually, they had to flee Mecca to the desert town of Yathrib, the birthplace of Muhammad's mother. This town was given the name *Madinat al-Nabi*, "The City of the Prophet," after Muhammad's arrival. This city is now referred to as Medina, and it is the place where the Prophet Muhammad is buried.

It was in Medina that Muhammad was able to form a community of Muslims that transcended tribal ties. The conflict with the Quraysh continued, as did the Qur'anic revelations that eventually led Muhammad to take

back the city of Mecca—this time, with virtually no opposition. The first thing Muhammad did after taking back Mecca was to promise its people that his army would not attack them or seek revenge. Next he cleared the Ka'ba of all idols—an act that many feared would bring upon him the wrath of the Arabian gods. When they saw how helpless their clay idols were, even the powerful Quraysh submitted to the call to Islam. The city has been a center of Islamic pilgrimage since then, now drawing approximately two-and-a-half million *Hajjis* (pilgrims) per year, as well as millions of other Muslims who perform the lesser pilgrimage known as the *'Umra*.

The *'Umra* is a series of rites that can take place any time of the year, other than the days of the official Hajj, which occurs in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. The 'Umra contains some, but not all, of the rites of the Hajj. The 'Umra is not one of the Pillars of Islam. One who makes the 'Umra is still required to make the Hajj pilgrimage. However, millions of Muslims perform the 'Umra each year, some because they are too old or frail to deal with the huge crowds during the Hajj and some because they want to become familiar with the rites of the pilgrimage before making the more difficult Hajj.

Books on Islam often claim that the Hajj serves to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad. However, it would be more accurate to state that the Hajj reconfirms the believer's commitment to the practice of one's faith and the worship of God. The rites that pilgrims perform actually have as much connection with the Prophet Abraham—to whom Muslims trace their religious roots along with Jews and Christians—as they do with the Prophet Muhammad. Abraham's connection with Mecca begins with a prayer for a son. God told Abraham that, despite his advanced age, he would be blessed with a son. Soon afterward, Abraham fathered his first son, Ishmael (Arabic *Isma'il*), with the Egyptian slave Hagar. According to Islamic tradition it was this son, Ishmael, whom Abraham was commanded to sacrifice. As both the Qur'an and the Bible state, Abraham passed this supreme test of faith and was rewarded with a lamb to be sacrificed in the place of his son. According to Islamic tradition, it was Abraham and Ishmael who later constructed (or re-constructed) the Ka'ba in Mecca and dedicated it with a prayer, as is related in the Qur'an:

> And remember that Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations
> Of The House with this prayer: "Our Lord! Accept this from us;
> Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.
>
> Our Lord! Make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy will, and of our progeny
> Make a Muslim people, bowing to Thy will. Show us our places
> For the celebration of rites, and turn unto us in Mercy;
> For Thou art the Oft-Returning, the Most Merciful."
>
> (Qur'an 2:127–128)

When they had finished rebuilding the Ka‘ba, God told Abraham to summon people to make pilgrimage to this holy site:

> And Lo! We made the Temple a goal to which people might repair
> Again and again, as a sanctuary. Take, then,
> The place where Abraham once stood as your place of prayer.
> Thus did We command Abraham and Ishmael: ‘‘Purify My Temple for those who will walk around it, and those who will abide near it in meditation, and those who will bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer.’’
>
> (Qur’an 2:125)

The use of the word ‘‘purify’’ is worthy of note here because Abraham was raised in a time and culture of pagan religions when people worshipped the moon, the stars, and even clay idols. Abraham, the patriarch of Monotheism, built the Ka‘ba to be empty, and there is a significant symbolism to this emptiness. This symbolizes the transition that some early humans made from the worship of tangible objects, such as clay statues, to the more sophisticated idea of worshipping a transcendent God who is not seen, but whose presence is manifested in all of creation. In a sense, Abraham’s reconstruction of the Ka‘ba marks a return to the spiritual purity of the beginning of time, such as that found in Adam and Eve before the Fall.

Abraham was eventually blessed with two sons, first Ishmael by Hagar and later Isaac by Sarah. It was through these two sons that he was destined to become the father of two great streams of humanity. But things did not continue peacefully for Abraham. According to Islamic tradition, when Hagar’s son Ishmael was still an infant, God instructed Abraham to take the two of them to the desert and return home alone. It was in the barren valley of Bacca (the ancient name for Mecca) that Abraham dutifully left them and walked away, leaving Hagar and Ishmael in God’s care. It is here that the element of submission now appears in the story of Hagar and creates her connection with the rites of Hajj. Stunned by Abraham’s behavior, she asks if her abandonment in the desert is ‘‘something from God.’’ When Abraham answered her in the affirmative, she submitted to this trial.

When her water and food ran out, it became obvious to Hagar that without help she and her son would die. In a frantic search for the assistance that she believed God would send, Hagar ran seven times to the top of two hills called Safa and Marwa, looking for water or for a trade caravan that could provide something to eat or drink. After seeing nothing each time, Hagar prayed to God for help. God sent the Angel Gabriel, who struck the ground with his foot and caused water to flow from the well in Mecca called Zam Zam. It is believed that this water has healing powers and can relieve both thirst and hunger. For centuries pilgrims have enjoyed the water from this well, and it still shows no sign of going dry. The experiences of Hagar, Abraham, and Ishmael, including their fears, sorrows, and blessings,

have been woven into the rites of the Hajj for centuries. These rites are described and sanctified in the Qur'an and have remained unchanged since the seventh century when the sacred text of Islam was revealed to Muhammad.

The first rite of the Hajj is the donning of simple, white seamless cloths. This act puts the Muslim into the state of *Ihram,* which means "ritual purity." Men wear two cloths—one wrapped around the lower part of the body, and the other wrapped around the upper part. Women have more options, but they must dress modestly. While many women choose to wear white, others wear clothing that is of some other subdued color. For this reason, one can see women pilgrims dressed in a wide variety of clothing, with their decision often influenced by traditions within their home country. The main point is to avoid drawing attention to oneself during a time when one's efforts are supposed to be focused on the sacred rites rather than the aesthetics of the face, body, or clothing.

The word *Ihram* refers both to the clothing one wears and to the state of purity one enters after performing ablutions and donning the simple clothes. When people are dressed in *Ihram,* it creates a sense of humility. When we perform the Hajj we have no idea if the person praying next to us is a member of a royal family or a farmer. This reminds the *Hajjis* (people making the Hajj) that all people are equal in the eyes of God. The clothing also serves as a visual connection between modern pilgrims and their religious ancestors such as Abraham, who would have circled the Ka'ba dressed in a similar manner. After making the pilgrimage, Hajjis are expected to dedicate themselves to pious activities and deny the vanities that create a sense of separation or superiority among people.

As people make ablutions and dress in our *Ihram,* they recite a prayer that states our intention to make the pilgrimage. From that point on, certain behaviors are forbidden until the Hajjis are out of the state of *Ihram.* These include sexual intercourse, cutting the hair or nails, killing game, arranging or performing marriages, and using perfume—a prohibition that includes the use of perfumed soap or shampoo. However, it is permissible to have used perfume before donning *Ihram,* even if the scent remains for a while. Women are also not supposed wear a face veil during the Hajj. In addition to these restrictions, unkind behavior—although always forbidden in Islam—is considered even more sinful during the Hajj and actually makes the pilgrimage invalid. The prohibitions of the Hajj are listed clearly in the Qur'an:

> For Hajj the months are well known.
> If any one undertakes that duty,
> Let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Hajj,
> For whatever good you do, (be sure) God knows it.
> And take provisions for the journey,

But the best provision is right conduct.
So fear me, O you who are wise."

(Qur'an 2:197)

Because of television, many non-Muslims are familiar with the sight of thousands of pilgrims circling the Ka'ba during the Hajj. This act of circling, also called a circumambulation, is known as *Tawaf* in Arabic. It is important to remember that Muslims do not believe that God is "in" the Ka'ba. This empty structure has many symbolic meanings for Muslims, including the omnipotent presence of God everywhere. The Ka'ba also serves to remind pilgrims that God is the source of all creation. The spot where the Ka'ba is situated is literally seen as the center of creation. Often the most emotional moment for the Hajji is the instant that she first lays eyes on this awesome scene. When I first entered the Great Mosque of Mecca my attention was drawn to the marble floors, the enormous chandeliers, and all the people praying to my side as I walked past pillar after pillar toward the center. It was from a distance that I first laid eyes upon the Ka'ba, and I knew that this was the most magnificent sight I would ever see. There was a virtual sea of people continuously swirling around the solid black structure, and I wondered how I would ever manage to find a place in that crowd of tens of thousands of worshipers. With astonishing ease, I became like a drop of water in that ocean of people and joined the waves of worshippers who were praying, walking in silence, or crying as they became overwhelmed with emotion.

Pilgrims circumambulate the Ka'ba seven times in obedience to the Qur'anic verse in which God told Abraham to purify His House for those who walk around it, meditate near it, and bow and prostrate themselves in prayer (Qur'an 2:125). It is crowded and hot during the *Tawaf:* some people are lost in prayer and some are simply trying to make it through the rites of the Hajj without getting crushed. Because of the large number and fervor of the pilgrims, this happens fairly often during the pilgrimage. On the other hand, during the few days that I was in Mecca, I saw three one-legged Hajjis making their way around the Ka'ba on crutches. People with such determination will perform the Hajj against all odds.

There are specific prayers to be offered during each part of the Hajj. However, there is one that people pray during the *Tawaf* and then continue to chant throughout the pilgrimage, creating a rhythmic echo like a heartbeat that reverberates throughout Mecca 24 hours a day:

Here I am at your service, oh Lord, here I am–here I am.
No partner do you have. Here I am.
Truly all praise and favor are yours, and dominion.
No partner do you have.

After making the *Tawaf,* the pilgrims, if possible, pray at the station of Abraham near the Ka'ba, although this is not mandatory. They do not pray to Abraham: instead, they pray to God at the place where Muslims believe Abraham once stood with his son Ishmael and dedicated the rebuilt sanctuary to God.

The next rite of the Hajj, which is also physically demanding, is the act of running seven times between the two hills of Safa and Marwa. This running, known in Arabic as *Sa'i,* is also mentioned in the Qur'an: "Behold! Safa and Marwa are among the symbols of Allah. So those who visit the House in the [Hajj] season or at other times should compass them round" (Qur'an 2:158). These hills, Safa and Marwa, are the same to which Hagar ran in her search for water for her infant son Ishmael. This re-enactment of a mother's desperate attempt to save her child commemorates both Hagar's faith in God and her spiritual strength at a time when many would have doubted God's mercy. The appearance of the Angel Gabriel, who revealed the well of Zam Zam to Hagar, serves as a symbol of God's reward for those who remain firm in their trust. "O ye who believe!" calls the Qur'an. "Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer: for God is with those who patiently persevere" (Qur'an 2:153).

After the Running, the pilgrims reward their spiritual efforts by refreshing themselves with water from the well of Zam Zam—a cooling water that is known to have healing powers. Recent studies of this water, which has flowed continuously since before the coming of Islam, has shown high levels of calcium, magnesium and germicidal fluorides, which may explain why the Prophet Muhammad called it the best water on earth.

The pilgrims then travel by foot or bus to the tent city of Mina to prepare for the next rite of the Hajj, which is standing on the Plain of Arafat. In Mina the accommodations are more rustic than those in Mecca, where the luckiest pilgrims can stay in hotel rooms. Thousands of poorer Hajjis simply set up camp on the streets or sidewalks of Mecca. Pilgrims spend the evening in Mina in tents that house up to 75 people each. It is here that all class distinctions really fade, and modern conveniences that are usually taken for granted, such as a clean shower, become treasured luxuries.

On the ninth day of the Month of Hajj, all pilgrims depart Mina for the plain of Arafat. The word *'Arafat* is related to the Arabic word *ma'rifa,* which means "knowledge"; in this case, the knowledge of God. Pilgrims stand in prayer and religious contemplation at Arafat for the entire day. This is one of the most emotional Hajj rites and people often reclaim their religion here, having drifted away from it over the years. Arafat is thus a place of spiritual reunion, and prayers offered here are said to have special *baraka,* or blessings. The devotional rites of this gathering recall the actions of the Prophet Muhammad, shortly before his death. Fourteen centuries ago, the Prophet climbed atop Mount Arafat and presented his last public speech and the following revelation, in which God said: "This day have I perfected

your Religion for you, completed my favors upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Qur'an 5:3).

After sunset the Hajjis leave Arafat and move *en masse* again, this time to the plain of Muzdalifa. Here they spend the entire evening outdoors praying, sitting in contemplation, eating, and sleeping on thin "Hajji mats" or sharing a blanket that someone has placed on the ground. They also gather stones to be thrown at the *Jamarat* (Pillars) on their return to Mina. When I was making the Hajj, I decided to walk the five miles back to the American section of the tent city in Mina rather than sit in the cramped bus. My efforts paid off when I arrived and realized that my friend and I had the entire women's area of the American section to ourselves—an area that was normally crammed with hundreds of Hajjis. A long, hot shower and a quiet cup of tea reinvigorated us for the next step, the Stoning.

This part of the Hajj has often been deadly because people are liable to be trampled by crowds.[14] There is only a short window of time during which more than two million people must throw seven stones at each of three pillars. These pillars represent the three times that Satan tried to persuade Abraham not to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, to God. The ritual of Stoning is performed three times over two days. It encourages pilgrims to consider temptation and to think about how they will turn away from temptation when they return to their homes and their daily activities. It also serves to remind the Hajjis of Abraham's willingness to submit to God's will when he was asked to sacrifice his eldest son, who was most dear to him.

The state of *Ihram* ends in Mina after the Stoning and a mood of gaiety arises out of the exhausted pilgrims. Women cut off a lock of their hair, in a symbolic gesture to commemorate the end of the state of *Ihram*. Men get a haircut or have their head completely shaved, according to their preference. Colorful clothing reappears on the Hajjis as they celebrate '*Id al-Adha,* the Feast of Sacrifice that celebrates the completion of the Hajj. This holiday is celebrated around the world so that Muslims who are unable to make the Hajj can nonetheless partake in the celebration of yet another annual pilgrimage. This holiday serves to unite Muslims from diverse regions in the Muslim world and reinforces the sense of the *Umma,* the Community that binds Muslims together across time and space.

The Feast of Sacrifice is a three-day celebration. During this time, Muslims sacrifice a sheep or another animal to commemorate God's mercy when a ram was offered to Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son. Every Hajji must sacrifice a lamb or a portion of a larger animal such as a camel or a cow. Booths can be found throughout Mecca and Mina, where Hajjis can make their payment for this sacrifice and have it done by professionals. Those who have the money to do so can sacrifice a larger animal such as a camel or a cow, but that is not a requirement of the pilgrimage. There are so many people on the Hajj that in 2005 the butchers of Mecca slaughtered 505,000 sheep, as well as 4,619 camels and cattle.[15] After the sacrifice, the meat is stored in massive

freezers and sent to various parts of the world as donations, particularly to areas that have suffered from natural disasters. All of the meat must be distributed before the next pilgrimage, so that people around the world—both Muslims and non-Muslims—can benefit from this final sacrifice of the Hajj.

The last thing the Hajjis do before departing for home is to make a final *Tawaf,* a circumambulation of the Ka'ba, in Mecca. Once again the pilgrims circle the Ka'ba seven times and then depart to their homes around the world to share their memories with friends and family. Although it is not an official requirement of the Hajj, many pilgrims also visit the mosque and tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. This offers a respite from the crushing crowds of Mecca and gives people a chance to feel the blessings of the Prophet's presence. The comparative quiet that one finds in the City of the Prophet encourages the pilgrim to reflect upon the peace one finds in protective love, as Muhammad discovered at the hands of his mother's tribe and from God.

PILLARS OF FAITH

In the Hadith of the Angel Gabriel reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, the Five Pillars of Islam are followed by another set of principles called the Pillars of Faith. While the Five Pillars of Islam rest in the realm of what Muslims do, the six Pillars of Faith lie in the realm of what Muslims believe. One can also look at the Pillars of Islam as visible, external behaviors, while the Pillars of Faith are more internalized: you can see Muslims praying, but that does not tell you what beliefs are supported by their religious tradition.

The Arabic word for faith is *iman.* Other words that share the same three-letter root, A-M-N, have the meanings of "security," "trust," and "deposit." These shared linguistic roots indicate the links in Islamic theology between having faith in God and finding a sense of security through that faith. The Qur'an makes this link clear: "Truly, it is in the remembrance of God that the heart finds rest" (Qur'an 13:28).

At the time of her conversion the person who embraces Islam affirms the Pillars of Faith and the Pillars of Islam. When considering the first Pillar of Faith, belief in one God, it is important to note that the fundamental message of all prophets within the Abrahamic tradition has been the same: there is only one God, and God's creation should worship Him and give thanks to Him. In addition, the Qur'an teaches that all elements of creation—not just humans—partake in praising God simply by doing what comes naturally to them. Many Qur'anic verses weave the manifestations of the created world into a tapestry of continuous worship, in which, for instance, birds praise their Lord by flying and clouds celebrate God's mercy by drifting across the sky. The following is an excellent example of such a verse:

Seest thou not that it is God whose praises all beings
In the heavens and on earth do celebrate,
And the birds of the air with wings outspread?
Each one knows its own mode of prayer and praise.
God knows well all that they do.

(Qur'an 2:41)

For Muslims the primary source of understanding the nature of God is the Qur'an, which they believe to be the literal word of God. Whereas Christians see Jesus as the *Logos,* or the "Word," Muslims see the Qur'an as the Holy Writ, or the "Word." In this respect, the Qur'an holds the same place within Islam as Jesus does within Christianity. In the Qur'an, God reveals His nature to the believer. He is, among other things, "The Cherisher," "The Helper," and "The Ruler of Judgment Day." There are 99 names for God in the Qur'an. These "Most Beautiful Names" as they are called, reflect the duality of God's nature. Some names, such as "The Merciful" and "The Protector," reflect a gentle, forgiving God. Others, such as "The Avenger" and "The Reckoner," serve to remind believers of God's overwhelming power. However, when one looks at all of the 99 names together, the names of compassion and mercy prevail. This does not mean that God does not bring about judgment and punishment, but it does indicate that one can turn to God for mercy and forgiveness.

The duality of God's nature is further expressed through the dichotomy of two words that are often used by Muslims in theological discussions. "Transcendence" (*tanzih*) refers to God's infinitely powerful nature, indicating that He is beyond all that we can imagine or compare. "Immanence" (*tashbih*) reflects God's familiarity with His creation. According to the Qur'an, God is so intimately involved with us that He is nearer to us than our jugular vein (Qur'an 50:16).

Finally, there is a strong element of *taqwa* within Islam, a term best translated as "God-consciousness." In the Hadith of the Angel Gabriel, the Prophet Muhammad is asked to describe virtue (*ihsan*). He answered: "Virtue means that you should worship God as if you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you." To the Muslim who is completely enveloped in *taqwa,* even a shadow can serve as a reminder to worship the Creator in a spirit of humility:

Do they not look at Gods' creation, even among inanimate things?
How their very shadows turn around, from the right and the left,
Prostrating themselves to God, in the humblest manner?

And to God doth obeisance, all that is in the heavens and on earth,
Whether moving creatures or angels,
For none are arrogant before their Lord.

(Qur'an 16:48–49)

The second Pillar of Faith is the belief in God's angels. Muslims believe that angels bring messages and carry out God's commands. As messengers, they serve as intermediaries between the sacred and the earthly realms. The Qur'an tells us that God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth (Qur'an 24:35). In the Islamic tradition angels are genderless beings made of light. For this reason, they are closest to God. Angels enlighten us by illuminating that which is unseen. Angels also "reveal" things to humans, particularly the Angel Gabriel who is the Angel of Revelation in both the Christian and the Muslim traditions. A good example of this shared tradition is the story of the Annunciation. In both the Christian and the Muslim stories, it is Gabriel who tells the Virgin Mary of the pending birth of her son, Jesus.

The Qur'an states that everyone has two Guardian Angels who record their deeds, both good and bad (Qur'an 82:11). The angel on the right records our good deeds, and the angel on the left records our bad deeds. This personal record of one's thoughts and deeds will be opened on Judgment Day. For this reason, at the end of each prayer Muslims turn their heads to each side and offer greetings to these unseen angels. In this way, they are reminded at least five times a day of the angels' presence.

Several angels are mentioned by name in the Islamic tradition. These include Michael, Gabriel, and Harut and Marut, two angels that gave knowledge to the people of Babylon. Two other angels, Nakir and Munkar, question the dead in their graves. Other unnamed angels perform such duties as bringing God news of His creatures, or travel across the earth in search of places where people have gathered for the sake of remembering God. As noble and pure beings, angels are a reflection of God's merciful nature. For this reason, they pray for the forgiveness of all creatures on earth:

> The heavens are almost rent asunder from above them (by His glory),
> And the angels celebrate the praise of their Lord and pray for forgiveness
> For all beings on earth. Behold! Verily God is He,
> The Oft-forgiving, the Most Merciful.
>
> (Qur'an 42:5)

The Prophet Muhammad had a special connection with the Angel Gabriel that went all the way back to his ancestors, Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael. When Abraham was instructed by God to leave Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, the Angel Gabriel struck the Earth and brought forth water for them. This water was sent by God as a mercy to Hagar and the small child, who was dying of thirst in her arms. This child, Ishmael, survived the desert heat to become the ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad, who would one day hear the voice of Gabriel announcing the revelation of Islam. This is the same angel that sits with Muhammad and questions him about faith in the Hadith of Gabriel.

The third Pillar of Faith is belief in God's revealed books. In Islamic theology, it is noted that humans sometimes become weak in their faith. For this reason, God sends both "signs" and "reminders" to them. Humans are constantly surrounded by Signs of God's mercy and majesty. One simply needs to take the time to contemplate such elements of creation as a leaf, a breeze, or a newborn infant to understand that God is all around us, as well as within us. A "Reminder," however, can take the form of a messenger, a Prophet, or a sacred text.

The sacred texts that Muslims believe to be inspired by God are the Torah (*al-Tawrat*), the Psalms of David (*al-Zabur*), the Gospel of Jesus (*al-Injil,* "The Evangel"), and the Qur'an. Muslims believe that God sent a series of sacred texts to humanity. This series culminated with the Qur'an, which God identifies as the final holy writ: a "Criterion" (*Furqan*) through which He makes clear to believers the difference between truth and falsehood:

> Thus, (O Prophet) He has revealed to you this book with the Truth— confirming the prophecies that preceded it— and (for the same purpose) He had revealed the Torah and the Evangel before it, as guidance for humankind. He has (now) revealed this Criterion.
>
> (Qur'an 3:3)

Within the Islamic tradition, the Old and New Testaments are not accepted in their entirety. The Arabic word *Tawrat* (Torah), refers to the "Five Books" of the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Arabic word *Injil* (Evangel) refers to the gospel that was revealed to Jesus. This word comes from the Greek *Evangelion,* which can be translated as "Good Tidings." Because of the special reverence given to these sacred texts, the Qur'an refers to Jews and Christians as *Ahl al-Kitab,* "People of the Book," and accords them special respect.

The fourth Pillar of Faith is belief in God's Messengers. These messengers include many of the Hebrew prophets of the Torah, as well as Jesus, John the Baptist, and prophets who are specific to the Arab people, such as Hud and Salih. Perhaps the best-known Qur'anic verse in reference to this long line of prophets is the following:

> Say: We believe in God and what was revealed unto us,
> And what was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob
> And the tribes, and what Moses and Jesus received,
> And what other Prophets received from their Lord.
> We make no distinction between any of them. Unto Him (alone) we have surrendered.
>
> (Qur'an 2:136)

Although Muhammad is the most important Prophet for Muslims, he is only mentioned twice by name in the Qur'an. The Prophet who is named most often is Moses, whose primary role is that of a lawgiver. Abraham also holds a central place in Muslim theology as the first monotheist. Abraham's central place within Islam is also reflected in the fact that many rites of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca commemorate him.

One difference between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions is the concept of sinlessness when dealing with all the Prophets. According to Muslim belief, the Prophets were selected by God himself to deliver His message to humanity in its pure form. They are incapable of lying, acting immorally, or making a mistake about the revelations that are entrusted to them. This is not only due to their sinless nature but also because the Qur'an makes it clear that if a Prophet were to lie about a revelation, God's punishment would be so severe that nothing could protect him from God's wrath (Qur'an 69:44–47). Prophets also serve as models for believers to emulate. This does not mean that a Prophet cannot make a minor mistake and then be corrected by God. For example, God admonished the Prophet Muhammad for turning away a blind man who sought religious guidance while the Prophet was busy talking to someone else (Qur'an 80:1–16). However, Prophets do not sin because that would be a willful disobedience of their Lord and an act of arrogance toward God.

Because of Islam's strict adherence to the principle of *Tawhid,* the absolute oneness of God, Muslims are forbidden to worship anything other than God. For this reason, the nature of Jesus within Islamic theology is that of a Prophet of God, a Sign of God, and a Mercy sent to the believers. The words of Jesus himself, as quoted in the Qur'an, best summarizes the Islamic concept of his nature:

> He said: "Behold, I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a Prophet,
> And made me blessed wherever I may be; and He has enjoined upon me prayer and charity as long as I live,
> And has endowed me with dutifulness toward my mother; and He has not made me haughty or bereft of grace.
> Peace was upon me the day I was born, and on the day of my death, and on the day when I shall be raised to life again.
>
> (Qur'an 19:30–33)

Muslims likewise are forbidden to worship Muhammad. Although he was selected by God to receive and pass on revelation, they are reminded of his humanity in the Qur'an (Qur'an 3:144). He is referred to as the "Seal of the Prophets," indicating that he is the last in a long line of prophets through whom God has sent a universal message to His creation. "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men; he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the

Prophets and God has knowledge of all things" (Qur'an 33:40). Muhammad was a humble and unlettered man who never learned to read or to write. He was pious from an early age and devoted much of his time to contemplation and prayer. He lived in poverty without complaint, always trusting in God's provision. He also had a reputation for being very kind to children, to the point where they enjoyed playing with him. The Qur'an presents Muhammad as a role model whose conduct serves as an inspiration for Muslims, both male and female: "You indeed have in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern of conduct for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day, and for those who engage much in the praise of God" (Qur'an 33:22).

The fifth Pillar of Faith is belief in the Last Day (*al-Yawm al-Akhir,* also known in Arabic as *Yawm al-Qiyama,* the Day of Judgment). Islamic traditions about the Day of Judgment are very close to those of Christianity and even include a role for Jesus as an intercessor before God. Many Muslims also believe in a quasi-prophetic figure called the *Mahdi,* "The Guided One," who will come after Jesus and bring a period of peace and justice that will last until the Day of Judgment. This figure does not appear in the Qur'an, but is a later addition from the Hadith.

Like the Christians, Muslims believe that people will be taken to account for their actions, both good and evil. They will either be rewarded with a place in the gardens of Paradise or be punished by the tribulations of hell. The primary moral question that one needs to ask oneself is really about time: Did I use my time here on earth to sow peace and kindness, or did I use my time to sow disharmony and grief? The duality of God's nature—He is a God of mercy and forgiveness and at the same time He is a God of power and revenge—plays an important role in the Islamic concept of Judgment Day. Islam is a strict religion, in that it lacks the idea of vicarious atonement such as one finds in Christianity. In Islamic theology, believers are held completely responsible for their thoughts and actions. Since no human being is perfect, one can only pray for God's mercy when she needs it the most. In the Qur'an, God tells the Prophet Muhammad to remind believers of His merciful nature: "When those come to you who believe in Our Signs, say: 'Peace be upon you. Your Lord has inscribed for Himself the rule of Mercy. If any of you does evil out of ignorance, and afterward repents and amends his conduct, [God] is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful'" (Qur'an 6:54).

We are clearly told in the Qur'an that we are the ones who wrong our own souls through the actions and deeds that we commit. Therefore, if we feel a sense of doom on Judgment Day, there is only one person to blame for it—ourselves. This is made clear in a very well-known hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad commented that the greatest *jihad,* or Struggle, that a believer must confront is the struggle against oneself.

Qur'anic descriptions of the Last Day paint a picture of the utter destruction of the world as we know it. A great trumpet will be blown and mountains will crumble to dust. The sky will be like molten brass, and the Earth

will be thrown into convulsions. At that time, all people both living and dead will be raised and questioned about what they did, and nothing will be hidden. The Qur'an presents a graphic description of what will happen to those of us who have devoted our lives to the violent pursuit of power and wealth:

> By the steeds that run, with panting breath, and strike sparks of fire,
> And press home the charge in the morning, and raise the dust in clouds,
> And penetrate into the midst of the foe en masse,
> Truly, man is ungrateful to his Lord,
> And to that fact he bears witness by his deeds, for violent is his love of wealth!
> Does he not know— When what is in the graves is scattered abroad,
> And what is locked in human breasts is made clear,
> That their Lord has been well acquainted with them, even to that day?
>
> (Qur'an 100:1–11)

On that day, the two angels that have recorded all the deeds of the Muslims will testify either for or against them. The angels Nakir and Munkar will question everyone in their grave, and a Time of Reckoning will come when the veil of denial is removed and people will see before them a scroll with a summary of their life. "Then shall each soul know what it has sent forward and what it has kept back" (Qur'an 82:5). Unique to Islam is the belief that when the souls are sorted out on the Day of Judgment, the tongues, hands, and feet of human beings will give testimony to the good that they have done. They will bear witness against human beings if they used their limbs and their faculty of speech for the pursuit of evil.

Qur'anic descriptions of hell bring forth images of utter agony in both the physical and the spiritual realms, for it is believed that the worst punishment one can experience is to be far from God. Those who submit to God's will and live a life of piety and grace are promised the garden of Paradise filled with flowing rivers, thrones of dignity, and an abundance of water and food. However, the finest reward of all is nearness to the Lord:

> Thus then, if he be of those nearest to God,
> There is for him rest and satisfaction, and a Garden of Delights.
> And if he be of the Companions of the Right Hand, (those who did good)
> For him is a salutation: Peace unto thee.
>
> Celebrate with praises the name of your Lord, the Supreme.
>
> (Qur'an 56:88–91, 96)

The sixth Pillar of Faith is the belief in God's determination of affairs, whether it involves fortune or misfortune. This Pillar of Faith affirms the concept of God's determination of the affairs of all creatures, which is a basic principle of Islamic theology. The Arabic word for this concept is

qadar. This word is sometimes translated as "predestination," but it is better understood when it is considered along with the idea of God's Oneness (*Tawhid*) as manifested in His omniscient presence and power. According to Islamic belief, nothing happens without God's knowledge and permission:

> With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that no one knows but He.
> He knows whatever there is on the earth and in the sea.
> Not a leaf falls, but with His knowledge.
> There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth,
> Nor anything green or withered,
> But that it is inscribed in a Record Clear.
>
> (Qur'an 6:59)

Related to the concept of God's omniscient power is the belief that He measures out our destinies, whether good or evil, joyous or sad. This applies to us both on a personal scale and on a grander, cosmic scale. For example, it was not my choice to decide when or where I would be born, what color my skin would be, or whom my parents would be. This was determined for me. On a larger scale, God has already determined whether I will wake up tomorrow to a sunny day or die in an earthquake. A true believer must recognize the impossibility for each one of us to determine what will happen in the grand scheme of things. Part of a Muslim's submission to the will of God is to accept the fact that our next breath may be our last. *Allahu a'lam,* as we say: God alone knows. We can only live each moment as if it is our last, and pray that it is not.

Another aspect of submission to God's will is to accept the fact that some people have more material wealth or may seem to have more blessings than others. This does not mean that people are not encouraged to better their lot. On the contrary: God measures out intelligence, sight, hearing, and the ability to reason. We show our gratitude for these faculties by using them, but only if we use them to do works of goodness, to do God's work. Using them to gain power over others or to accumulate an excess of material goods is a misuse of God's gifts, and will be dealt with on the Day of Judgment. God measures out our destinies, and we do the best we can with whatever we are given. In this sense, one who complains because other people receive more than he has, shows ingratitude. On the other hand, because money and other forms of wealth are literally gifts from God and are looked upon as something "on loan" to us, a Muslim who has been blessed with abundance is required to share his wealth. Taking on an air of superiority because of material wealth would imply that the wealthy individual assumes that his blessings are to be credited only to his efforts. This is also an example of ingratitude and arrogance toward one's Lord. In this way, God's reward or bounty can be a test. As the Qur'an reminds us, the person who fails this test creates her own misery:

Let not those who covetously withheld of the gifts
That God has given them with His grace, think that it is good for them.
Nay, it will be the worse for them.
Soon shall the things that the covetous withheld be tied to their necks,
Like a twisted collar on the Day of Judgment! To God belongs the inheritance
Of the Heavens and the Earth. And God is well acquainted with all that you do.

(Qur'an 3:180)

Just as the Qur'an reminds us that all events are known to God before they occur, it also affirms that humans have the ability to make a choice between good and evil. If this were not so, what would be the purpose of Judgment Day? What God knows ahead of time is that each person will be offered temptations in her life and that each will be forced to make a decision as to which path she will follow—the straight or the crooked. Before we are born, God knows what our challenges will be and how we will cope with them. In this sense, the Prophet Muhammad's comment that a person's final destination, whether it be heaven or hell, is already predetermined before birth is correct. The statement makes sense because God alone is all knowing. In His mercy, God has measured out His guidance along with the human capacity to discern good from evil, providing believers with a combination of predestination and free will. For this reason, "Satan has no authority over those who have faith and put their trust in the Lord" (Qur'an 16:99).

NOTES

1. Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), xxv.
2. Ibid., 167.
3. See http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/pillars.shtml (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 2.524).
4. Alim CD-ROM (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 2.504).
5. See http://www.muslimaccess.com/sunnah/sahabah/HAKIM_IBN_HAZM.htm (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 2.551).
6. In the Qur'anic verse to which this statement refers (9:104), Muslims are told that even God accepts gifts of charity in the form of repentance and righteous works from believers. However, it is not correct to insinuate that the believer is superior to God because of this. This is what Hujwiri means by an "utterly false" notion.
7. 'Ali B. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; repr., London: Luzac & Co., 1976), 316.
8. Alim CD-ROM (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 3.128)
9. It is thought that the Prophet Muhammad decided not to perform his *Tarawih* prayers in the mosque because of the crowd that gathered to follow his example. He was afraid that Muslims would assume that these prayers were obligatory, so he prayed

at home. See http://www.geocities.com/abusamad/tarawih.html. See also, Alim CD-ROM (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 9.393).

10. See http://www.islamonline.net/english/index.shtml (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 3.227).

11. There is a debate about exactly when in Ramadan this event took place, so it is not a spiritual necessity to pinpoint the exact date of *Laylat al-Qadr*. According to the Prophet's wife Aisha, it was on an odd-numbered evening that fell within the final ten nights of the month.

12. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub,* 329

13. One of the most racially and culturally diverse groups at the Hajj is the North Americans. In 2005, there were 12,750 pilgrims (who call themselves *Hajjis*) from the United States. See, for example, http://www.saudiembassy.net/2005News/News/HajDetail.asp?cIndex=5017.

14. One of the most tragic years at the *Jamarat* (Stoning area) was 2004, when 244 people were trampled to death, including one child. After that the government of Saudi Arabia made major changes to the traffic pattern and tried to eliminate the danger of a stampede. However, in 2006 more pilgrims were trampled at the Stoning Area. In 1990, a stampede at Safa and Marwa, the site of the Running, killed 1426 people, prompting the organization to make changes in that part of the Hajj as well.

15. On the number of animals slaughtered at Mecca and Mina during the Hajj in 2005, see http://www.saudiembassy.net/2005News/News/HajDetail.asp?cIndex=5000.

3

Ramadan House Guest

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

Fasting is Mine.

—Hadith Qudsi

Ramadan has come to live with us.
It is God's private apartments
moved into our house
and taking over.
Where the doors were
are now entranceways into His Garden.
Where windows were are
continuous waterfalls. Abundance in the

dryness. Hidden in the dust:
clusters of roses. Sprung from our
footsteps: *ascents.* Climbs past the
usual dimensions: *the usual*
ticking clock in the antechamber. The ancient
mahogany piano has become
rock crystal, playing only
God's music on
silent keys. There is a

haunting rise and fall of
distant melody come
close to the inner ear, come
closer even than our
own physicality, a
sound more essential than the
marrow of our bones or the

enormous sailing surface of the
    corpuscles of our blood, that is

His interconnecting rooms leading always past the
closed door of His Presence, the

open hallways of approach, the
retreating audience halls where
    attendants move with
        melodious precision, and speak in an
undertone of avalanche, words of
rainforests keeping earth's atmosphere filled with
    breathable air, deeps of the
nearest ocean where various
        killer whales congregate in
            affable groups.

The earth is an outdoor amphitheater of
    affable groups, and time a

    shudder of water across fans of spray at the
    source of the cascade of all
        creaturely manifestation.

When the rooms are filled with the yearly fast
the most geographical distances are drawn near,
Watusi warriors in tiger pelts arrive in silent droves,
desert men in blazing white burnooses slide
        down off their donkeys and
            come in, Siamese ladies in
    straight batik skirts stand in
        angular poses to the
click of passing birds, and a

    white wind sweeps across everything that
inhales or intakes, exhales or
        digests. The very
            air becomes a

stomach turned inside-out in which
the sun and all her
    planets turn in
        wide swinging arcs in the

tonal soup of darkness.

God says, "Fasting is Mine."

Because He alone knows its
dimensions. It
contains each ant and
microbe in the

drama of being a creature.

Ramadan has moved
into the earth
like a different sky
settling down on the
same dunes.

For a month the feast takes place in a
heavenly dimension. Trays are

brought in from

other atmospheres.

Our house is His. Its guests
belong to Him. The
repast is His, the

withholding and giving is

He alone.

5 Ramadan

NOTE

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4

The Qur'an, the Word of God

Mustansir Mir

Like the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an, the scripture of Islam, is considered sacred by those who believe in it as the Word of God. According to Muslim belief, God revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad (570–632 CE), the Arabian Prophet of Islam, in small and large portions over a period of about 22 years. About the size of the New Testament, the Qur'an has been preserved in Arabic, the language in which it was originally revealed. And while the Qur'an calls the variety of languages spoken by humankind as "one of the signs" of God (Qur'an 30:22), there is no doubt that Arabic, being the vehicle of the Word of God, has always enjoyed special importance in both the Islamic religion and the Islamic civilization.[1]

THE MEANING OF THE TERM, *QUR'AN*

The word *Qur'an* means both "recitation" and "reading": it is read from a text as well as recited from memory. These twin meanings carry a significance that may not be readily apparent. Today, the word *Qur'an* brings to mind a printed copy of the Qur'an. At its inception, however, the Qur'an was essentially an oral communication. But soon it was proclaimed a book. In the history of Arabia, in fact, the Qur'an was the first discourse self-consciously to call itself a book. It was only after the revelation of the Qur'an as a book that the arts of reading and writing were seriously cultivated in Arabia, this cultivation leading, relatively quickly, to a transformation of a largely oral culture into a literate one. Since the Qur'an was the Word of God, everything about it was viewed as significant—its vocabulary, its grammar, its law, its theology, and its ethics—and had to be studied with the utmost reverence and diligence. Study of the Qur'an led to the production of commentaries on the Qur'an. In this way, the science of *tafsir,* or Qur'anic exegesis, was born. But this only was one of the many sciences, or disciplines of knowledge, to which the study of the Qur'an gave rise.

A close review of Islamic intellectual history would show that practically all of the Islamic sciences are, in one way or another, grounded in the Qur'an.

In Arabic, the name *Qur'an* has the definite article prefixed to it: *al-Qur'an*. This prefix implies that the Qur'an is essential reading, that it provides crucial guidance for life, and that its message may be ignored or neglected only at one's own peril.

It is important to note a few of the many names the Qur'an uses for self-designation. To begin with, the phrase *Kalam Allah* (Qur'an 9:6; 48:15), meaning "the Word or Speech of God," sets the Qur'an apart from all other speech, even from the speech of prophets, including that of Muhammad, the bearer of the Qur'an. The name *Tanzil* (Qur'an 26:192), "sending down," simultaneously connotes (1) descent of something exalted and (2) gradual dispensation. In other words, the Qur'an is exalted Divine speech that was dispensed in portions over many years, such that it may be easy for people to understand, digest, and put it into practice. The name *Furqan* (Qur'an 25:1) means, "that which sifts, divides, differentiates." That is, the Qur'an clearly distinguishes between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, so that it can be relied on as a safe guide. The name *Dhikr* (Qur'an 43:44) means "reminder." The Qur'an is a scripture that reminds human beings, on the one hand, of the verities that they are instinctively aware of but may have forgotten through worldly involvements and, on the other hand, of the truths presented by the previous messengers—truths forgotten or consigned to neglect in the course of time. Among the other names used for the Qur'an are *Huda* (Qur'an 27:77), "guidance," that which points out and leads to the right destination; *Nur* (Qur'an 4:174), "light," that which dispels the darkness of misguidance, causing the truth to shine forth brightly; *Hikma* (Qur'an 17:39), "wisdom;" and *Rahma* (Qur'an 27:77), "mercy." These and other names of the Qur'an not only represent the Qur'an's self-understanding but may also serve as clues and suggestions for reading the Qur'an in certain ways.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an has 114 chapters and over 6,000 verses. The word for "chapter" is *sura,* which literally means "an enclosing wall," like a wall that encloses a city. As such, the name signifies that each chapter of the Qur'an is like an enclosure in which reside the inhabitants—namely, the verses—that belong in it. Already one can see that the word *Sura* suggests that some kind of kinship or close relationship exists among the verses of a given chapter of the Qur'an, a suggestion that we will examine further a little later. The word for "verse" is *Aya,* which literally means "sign." It is translated as "verse" when it refers to a statement, or a portion of a statement, in the Qur'an.

Thus, the verses of the Qur'an are signs that point to certain truths and realities, God Himself being the greatest truth and the greatest reality.

The chapters of the Qur'an vary greatly in length. The shortest *suras* (103, 108, and 110) consist of three verses, the longest *sura* (2) runs to 286 verses, and many are medium sized. The length of verses also varies considerably.

In printed copies of the Qur'an, each chapter is identified as having been revealed either in the city of Mecca or in the city of Medina and is, accordingly, known as Meccan or Medinan. These designations carry more than just geographical significance. For the first 13 years of his prophetic ministry, Muhammad was in Mecca. It was here that he gained his first converts. But in Mecca, Muhammad and his followers were a minority—often a persecuted minority. The Meccan revelations deal with matters of faith, such as the fundamentals of Islamic dogma and the principles of ethics. In the last 10 years of his prophetic ministry, Muhammad was in Medina, to which he and his followers had emigrated in 622 CE. In Medina, the Muslims acquired a position of power and founded the first Islamic state. Reflecting the changed situation, the Medinan revelations deal with the political, social, and economic aspects of Muslim life. Thus, the designation "Meccan" informs the reader that a *sura* is principally concerned with subjects like faith and ethics, whereas the designation "Medinan" indicates that a *sura* is likely to focus on matters of social organization. However, in the larger scheme of Qur'anic thought, the Meccan versus Medinan distinction often breaks down. Medinan *suras* frequently take up the themes of faith and ethics, using them as a base for presenting legislative verses, and the Meccan *suras* often point ahead in the direction of Medina. Partly because of such a relationship between the two types of *suras,* Meccan *suras* sometimes contain verses revealed in the Medinan period and vice versa.

THE QUR'AN AS REVELATION

The Muslim understanding of the Qur'an as the Word of God is the basis of the Islamic view of revelation. The Arabic word for revelation is *wahy*. As a revelation from God, *wahy* carries the sense of otherness—that is, it is an objective phenomenon. In other words, *wahy* is not the product of a Prophet's mind but is transmitted by a prophet from God without any alteration of form or meaning. On this view, the Qur'an is the Word of God, not the Word of Muhammad. Revelation (*wahy*) is to be distinguished from inspiration (*ilham*). In Islamic dogma, prophets are believed to be in a general state of inspiration. Thus, when they speak in their "official"—that is to say, prophetic—capacity, their utterances have an authoritative character. Still, such utterances are to be distinguished from the Divine Word, which a prophet himself would clearly identify as divine and not his own and whose conduit he would declare himself to be.

The notion of revelation has had some ramifications in Islamic religious history; we will note two of them. First, since the Qur'an is the Word of God in respect of form no less than of meaning, the language of the Qur'an, being the language of God, is considered matchless. Islamic theology develops this idea into the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'an (*I'jaz al-Qur'an*). A number of Qur'anic verses challenge the Qur'an's opponents to produce something like the Qur'an if they deny its divine origin (Qur'an 2:23; 11:13; 17:88; 52:33–34). Muslim theologians take this challenge—which, they claim, has never been met in history—as proof of the Qur'an's divine origin. Second, since the language of the Qur'an is divine, a translation of the Qur'an by human beings is not the Qur'an. Accordingly, only the Arabic Qur'an may be recited in formal prayers, and only one who memorizes part or all of the Arabic Qur'an can be said to have memorized the Qur'an. This view of the Arabic Qur'an also explains why, historically, Muslims have been reluctant to translate their scripture and why a vibrant tradition of Qur'an translation—comparable to that of Bible translation, for example—has only developed recently in Islam. Even today, many Muslims have a certain distrust of the translated Qur'an.

THE COMPILATION OF THE QUR'AN

The traditional account of the compilation of the Qur'an has been criticized in some quarters of Western scholarship. But so far, this criticism has neither dislodged the Muslim account from its position nor led to the construction of a satisfactory alternative view. Under the circumstances, it would be reasonable to speak of the traditional account as being broadly valid.

According to this account, the compilation of the Qur'an occurred in three stages. The First Compilation was made during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. When a revelation came to Muhammad, it was, on the one hand, avidly memorized by Muslims and, on the other hand, written down in a certain sequence by designated scribes under the Prophet's instructions. Since the writing materials then available were rudimentary—parchment, thin flat stones, or animal shoulder bones—not all written records could be maintained in the new and continually evolving order of compilation. Muslims who had some or all of these records possessed them in different arrangements, although they often knew the order in which the Prophet intended those records to be arranged.

The First Compilation of the Qur'an aimed at no more than bringing into existence a written record of the Qur'an. This was because the main way for preserving the Qur'an was still memorization. There is evidence that Muslims knew the proper order of the Qur'anic revelations, but it was physically not possible to induce that order among the numerous

media on which the scripture had been inscribed. Circumstances soon necessitated the making of another compilation. The Second Compilation of the Qur'an was made in 633 CE, after the death of Muhammad and under the first caliph of Islam, Abu Bakr. During Abu Bakr's caliphate, several tribes revolted against Islam, and they had to be subdued by force of arms. In the wars that resulted, a large number of people who had memorized the Qur'an—and were known as Qur'an-readers—were killed. Some people became apprehensive that the First Compilation, given the variety of the media on which it was preserved, would not be adequate. Abu Bakr accepted the suggestion of some to prepare a compilation that differed from the first one only in respect of being more accessible by being written on more standardized media.

During the rule of the third caliph, 'Uthman (644–656 CE), this compilation was used to make the Third Compilation of the Qur'an. This Third Compilation produced the definitive copy of the Qur'an that is read by all Muslims today. The Caliph 'Uthman appointed a committee of noted companions of the Prophet Muhammad and memorizers of the Qur'an to resolve disputes about a handful of verses that some thought should belong to the Qur'an and others thought should be considered Hadith, statements of the Prophet Muhammad that did not come from God. After the Third Compilation was approved, copies of this so-called 'Uthman Scripture were sent to major cities of the Islamic world so that they might serve as master copies for people to use as standard reference texts. Today, most Muslim scholars hold that the arrangement of verses and *suras* in the Qur'an follow the arrangement that Muhammad himself approved under the guidance of the Angel Gabriel. Thus, both the text of the Qur'an and the present arrangement of its verses are considered to be sacrosanct.

THE GENRE OF THE QUR'AN

What type of a book is the Qur'an, and to what genre does it belong? Is it a book of history? The Qur'an does contain history, but it does not offer a detailed historical account, neither of the world nor of any nation or country. The Qur'an is selective in its use of history. For example, it talks about previous nations and prophets, but only in reference to the message it seeks to present. So, while it contains history, it cannot be called a book of history.

Is it a book of ethics? The Qur'an states and explains principles of ethical behavior and identifies the virtues it seeks to inculcate and the vices it wants people to shun, but it cannot be compared to a research work on ethics. One will not find in the Qur'an a statement and analysis of various theories of ethics. So, while the Qur'an has a definite ethical perspective, it cannot be called a book of ethics.

Is it a book of law? The Qur'an has many legal injunctions, and these bear upon criminal law, civil law, and even international law. But again, the Qur'an does not deal with the law in a systematic and comprehensive way. Hence, it cannot be called a book of law. We can similarly ask whether the Qur'an is a book of theology, metaphysics, and so on, reaching, in each case, the same conclusion. So, how do we classify the Qur'an?

The easiest way to describe the Qur'an is to call it what it calls itself—a Book of Guidance. The Qur'an purports to furnish human beings with the fundamental guidance they need to organize their lives in order to live successfully in this world and achieve salvation in the next. This is not to say that the Qur'an has no faith in human beings' ability to find their own guidance. Quite the contrary is true. Specific prescriptive material forms only a small part of the Qur'an, though general principles and guidelines abound in it. This is an important fact that suggests that, to a large extent, the Qur'an leaves human beings free to envision and plan their lives. The imposing body of medieval Islamic law actually proves this thesis, since this body of law represents but one possible instance of the construction of a legal–cultural system undertaken by distinguished Muslim minds in light of the guidance found in the Qur'an and in the Prophet's exemplary practice, called *Sunna*. This particular historical construction does not foreclose the possibility of Muslims engaging—with proper qualifications and preparation, of course—in a similar exercise today with a view to arriving at a new construction more responsive to present-day needs. This explains why, from time to time in Islamic history, one hears the call to return to pristine Islam, such a call representing dissatisfaction with the legal and other structures that are presumed to have lost some or much of their utility after having served Muslim societies well for a long time.

THEMES OF THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an deals with a limited number of themes, but it foregrounds them again and again, in a variety of situations and from different angles. The major themes of the Qur'an can be summed up under three headings: faith, ritual, and conduct.

Faith

The most fundamental element of the Islamic faith is monotheism, the belief that there is but one God. *Sura* 102, which is called The *Sura* of Sincerity, is probably the Qur'an's most important statement of monotheism: "Say: He—God—is Uniquely One. God is the Refuge. He did not beget and He was not begotten. And He has no peers."

The so-called Throne Verse (Qur'an 2:255) is also an important statement of Islamic monotheism:

> God—there is no god but He, the Living, the Great Sustainer. He is overtaken neither by drowsiness nor by sleep. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His leave? He knows what is in front of them and what is behind them. And they cannot encompass any part of His knowledge—except what He should wish. His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and guarding them does not fatigue Him. He is the Exalted, the Great.

The God of the Qur'an has many attributes. He is the creator of the universe, which He administers. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, forgiving, just, and merciful. The most important of all of God's attributes is His mercifulness: He is quick to forgive and slow to anger. Those who repent sincerely are not only forgiven but their bad deeds are also converted into good deeds (Qur'an 25:70).

The very frequent references to God in the Qur'an might suggest that the Qur'an does nothing but talk about God—that it is theocentric. But a deeper look will reveal that the Qur'an is equally concerned with human beings and their destiny. The commandments, ethical injunctions, legal stipulations, historical accounts—in brief, nearly everything in the Qur'an makes a direct or indirect, but in every case definite, reference to the human situation, with the avowed ultimate goal of improving that situation.

Another important element of the Islamic faith is prophecy. God provides guidance to humankind through chosen individuals, called prophets, who not only convey that guidance but also exemplify it in their lives, so that both the theoretical and the practical aspects of that guidance are presented before the nations to whom those prophets have been sent. According to the Qur'an, the prophets of all ages present the same essential message. This unity of message furnishes a conceptual basis for regarding, first, the prophets as members of a single brotherhood and, second, their nations as segments of a worldwide human community. The Qur'an thus uses the notion of the unity of the prophets' message to reinforce the idea of a common humanity. This idea is further reinforced by the Qur'anic assertion that God has sent messengers among all the nations of the world (Qur'an 35:24). There is therefore no reason to regard the Middle East as the exclusive venue of prophecy. In Islam, Adam is the first prophet and Muhammad is the last.

The Qur'an presents the afterlife as a necessary complement to earthly life. According to the Qur'an, this world is not a place where complete recompense for good or evil actions is meted out. There is, thus, a need for another place where full, unbiased, and swift recompense for all actions can be given, and this need is satisfied by the Hereafter.

Ritual

The Qur'an speaks of all the four main Islamic rituals—prayer (*Salat*), mandatory almsgiving (*Zakat*), fasting (*Sawm*), and pilgrimage (*Hajj*). It gives some details about each, but the full elaboration of the rituals, as of many other matters, is left to the *Sunna,* the Way of the Prophet Muhammad. By requiring believers to devote time, energy, and money to the performance of these rituals, the Qur'an seeks to strengthen their commitment and keep them rightly oriented. The rituals of Islam have a strong social dimension; that is, they are intended to create and reinforce the bonds that ought to exist among members of a believing community. For example, the *Zakat* Alms Tax, which is one of several steps the Qur'an takes to ensure a wider distribution of wealth in society, helps alleviate economic deprivation. The annual pilgrimage to the Ka'ba and the Sacred Mosque of Mecca, which is performed together by hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world, brings home the point that race, color, language, and other such social markers are irrelevant for the purpose of defining the essential humanity of human beings.

Conduct

The Qur'an contains injunctions about legal, political, and social matters. It seeks to organize family life by laying down rules for marriage and divorce (Qur'an 2:221, 229–237, 240–241; 4:3, 19–25, 35, 128–129; 5:5; 24:3, 32), for dividing a deceased person's property (Qur'an 2:180, 4:7–9, 11–12, 176), and for making loan transactions (Qur'an 2:282). It distinguishes between lawful food and unlawful food (Qur'an 2:168, 172–173; 5:3–5; 6:118–119, 121, 145–146; 16:114–116), decrees punishments for certain offenses (Qur'an 5:38; 17:32; 24:2–9), and provides basic guidelines for running the Muslim body politic (Qur'an 4:59; 42:38). It advises kind treatment of parents (Qur'an 17:23; 29:8; 31:14; 46:15), promotes virtues like forbearance and repaying good for evil (Qur'an 23:96; 28:54; 41:34; 42:37, 40; 7:199), and forbids backbiting and calumny (Qur'an 24:4, 6–9). The ultimate goal of all such injunctions is to create ethically centered individuals, on the one hand, and to bring into existence an integrated and harmonious society, on the other. The following verses contain a few of the Qur'anic injunctions concerning conduct:

> God commands us to deliver up trusts to those to whom they belong. And when you adjudicate between people, adjudicate with justice. It is a fine piece of advice that God gives us! Indeed, God is Keen of Hearing, Very Watchful.
>
> (Qur'an 4:58)

> You will never attain piety until you spend of what you love. And anything you spend of—God has full knowledge of it.
>
> (Qur'an 3:92)

> Say: Come, I shall recite what God has made unlawful for you: That you shall not associate anything with Him and be good to your parents. Do not kill your children from considerations of poverty. We give sustenance to you and to them. Do not approach immoral acts, the obvious one among them and the hidden ones. Do not kill a soul whom God has declared unlawful to kill—except with justification. This is what He has advised you of, that you may have understanding. Do not approach the orphan's property—except in a way that is best—until he should reach full maturity. Give full measure and weight, with fairness. We do not obligate a person except to the extent of his capacity. When you speak, be just—even if [the person] should be a relative. And fulfill the commitment with God. This is what He has advised you of, that you may take remembrance.
>
> (Qur'an 6:151–152)

> The believers are brothers, so make peace between your two brothers. And have fear of God, that you may be shown mercy. O you who believe, let not one group of people make fun of another—it is possible that they are better than them—or women, of women—it is possible that they are better than them. And do not make cutting remarks about yourselves[2] or call one another names. How bad is the very word "transgression" after belief! And those who do not repent, they, and they alone, are the unjust. O you, who believe, shun most conjecture. Indeed, some conjecture is sin. And do not pry. Do not backbite one another: Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?[3] You would detest it! And have fear of God. Indeed, God is Most Forgiving, Very Merciful.
>
> (Qur'an 49:10–12)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE QUR'AN

Modern readers generally find the Qur'an to be a difficult book to navigate. Perhaps what troubles them most is the seeming lack of structure in the Qur'an. One sometimes gets the impression that the Qur'an moves haphazardly from one subject to another, hardly offering a sustained treatment of a given subject and without explaining why the frequent change of subjects takes place. That the Qur'an is unlike most books is soon noticed by readers, who remain puzzled as to why the Qur'an is—to borrow a word that Western scholars often use to describe it—"disjointed."

A few classical scholars in fact discussed the structure of the Qur'an, but its extensive treatment belongs in the modern period. While a detailed examination of the subject is not possible here, the following observations will suggest that there is a method, both to the sequence of the verses in a

given *sura* and to the sequence of the *suras* in the Qur'an, as it has come down to us.

First, many of the Qur'anic *suras,* especially the short *suras* toward the end of the Qur'an, obviously are unities. For example, the last 35 *suras* (*Suras* 80–114) of the Qur'an, ranging from 3 to 46 verses, each seem to offer a coherent treatment of one or more themes. In many medium-sized *suras* too, the general drift of the discourse is easily noticed, even if the relationship between some of the verses or passages is not fully clear.

Second, certain themes are often grouped together in the Qur'an. For example, the same Qur'anic passage may discuss the need to protect human life and the need to protect property. *Sura* 4:29 of the Qur'an reads: "O you who believe, do not devour one another's wealth unjustly—except that it take the form of commerce, with your mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (that is, one another). Indeed, God is very kind to you." *Sura* 2:178–182 lays down the law of retaliation for murder and, at the same time, urges that the bequest of a deceased person be executed without any wrongful alteration of the terms of the bequest.

Third, a brief statement in one *sura* sometimes finds elaboration in the following *sura*. For example, *Sura* 25 of the Qur'an (*al-Furqan,* "The Criterion") makes a general reference to previous nations' rejection of the prophets who were sent to them and cites the names of a few such prophets. Verses 35–44 open with a reference to Moses, who, according to the Qur'an, was sent to prophesy to Pharaoh and his people. The following *sura, Sura* 26 (*al-Shu'ara',* "The Poets"), provides details of the rejection of prophets mentioned in *Sura* 25, citing incidents from the lives of the prophets mentioned in the previous *sura* and also from the lives of a few other prophets not mentioned in that *sura*.

Fourth, in many cases, one *sura* picks up the theme on which the preceding *sura* ends. For example, the concluding verses of *Sura* 22 (*al-Hajj,* "The Pilgrimage") enjoin Muslims to bear witness to the peoples of the world and, to that end, to discipline themselves by carrying out such religious obligations as performance of the daily prayers and payment of the *Zakat* Tax. The opening verses of *Sura* 23 (*al-Mu'minun,* "The Believers") speak of the obligations that believers must perform; these obligations include the daily prayers and the *Zakat* tax, mentioned in *Sura* 22. Similarly, *Sura* 105 (*al-Fil,* "The Elephant") speaks of God's protection of the sanctuary of the Ka'ba in Mecca against the invading army of the Yemenite ruler Abraha. *Sura* 106 (*Quraysh,* "The Tribe of Quraysh") says that the Quraysh, the tribe of Mecca's idolatrous rulers, ought to worship Allah, the only true deity. This is because they owe their affluence and prestige to their custodianship of the Ka'ba, which, as the preceding *sura* says, God protected against a major attack.

The foregoing discussion underscores the need to revisit the charge of disconnectedness that is often made against the Qur'an. Two more points need to be made. First, a main thing to consider in studying the structure of the

Qur'an is the living context of the Qur'an. The Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum, but in a live setting composed of a wide variety of elements. The Qur'an, delivered by the Prophet Muhammad in an oral situation, addressed supporters, opponents, and doubters at the same time; it consoled the Prophet, replied to his critics, and counseled the believers; it recounted past history, commented on recent events, and charted a course for the future. Thus, for example, while addressing the believers, the Qur'an may suddenly and without giving any warning start addressing the disbelievers, for they too form part of the Qur'an's audience. Such sudden shifts of address may be perplexing to readers unfamiliar with the presumption one has to make of a live and diverse audience of the Qur'an. Second, the Qur'an, following the style of Classical Arabic, does not usually employ the transitional expressions on which modern readers rely so heavily for establishing links between the parts of a discourse. Words and phrases such as "therefore," "consequently," "however," "in view of the above," and "on a different note," which are important external aids for connecting parts of a talk or a piece of writing, are often skipped in Classical Arabic, the listener or reader being supposed to supply them mentally.

THE STYLE OF THE QUR'AN

The language and style of the Qur'an are, in many respects, akin to the language and style of pre-Islamic Arabic literature—or, more specifically, of Arabic poetry. The vocabulary and style of the Qur'an, however, are much simpler than those of pre-Islamic poetry, and, as such, are more accessible to a larger audience. In the Qur'an, as in pre-Islamic poetry, there is abundant use of imagery, and so similes, metaphors, and parables are frequently employed. Strictly speaking, the language of the Qur'an is neither prose nor poetry, although it has elements of both. The term "rhymed prose" (*saj'* in Arabic) is often used to describe the Qur'an's language, which, as a rule, is also quite terse.

Along with the distinction they make with regard to subject matter, scholars often make a stylistic distinction between the Meccan *suras,* which are more poetic, and the Medinan *suras,* which are more discursive and matter-of-fact. The following passage from the Meccan *Surat al-Naba'* ("The Tidings," 78:1–17) provides an example of this. Arguing from the principle that privilege entails responsibility, this *sura* says that nature is a source of blessings for human beings, who will be asked, on Judgment Day, whether they showed gratitude to God for such blessings:

> What are they querying one another about?
> About the Momentous News (of the Final Hour)
> In regard to which they are of different opinions.
> Certainly not! They will soon find out.

> Again, certainly not! They will soon find out.
> Have We not made the earth a cradle
> And the mountains stakes?
> And We created you in pairs,
> And We made your sleep a comfort,
> And We made the night a garment,
> And We made the day a time for earning a livelihood,
> And We made, above you, seven Firm Ones (that is, the seven heavens),
> And We installed a blazing lamp,
> And We sent down, from the wringing wet ones (the clouds), streaming water,
> That We may cause to grow, by means of it, grains and vegetables
> And dense gardens.
> Indeed, the Day of Decision is an appointed time.

Now let us look at a passage from the Medinan *Surat al-Ma'ida* ("The Table Spread," 5:1–3). These verses, which refer to certain rituals of the Hajj pilgrimage, urge the believers to fulfill their obligations:

> O you who believe, fulfill your contracts. Made lawful for you are animals of the type of cattle—except that which is being recited to you—without making hunted game lawful while you are in a state of sanctity. O you who believe, do not desecrate any of the symbols of God: the sacred months, the sacrificial offerings, the collared animals, or those intending to go to the Sacred House, seeking as they do bounty from their Lord and His pleasure. And when you leave the state of sanctity, then you may hunt. Let not the enmity of a group of people induce you—on account of their having kept you from the Sacred Mosque—to commit aggression. Cooperate in piety and Godfearingness, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And have fear of God. Indeed, God is swift in punishment. Made unlawful for you are carrion, blood, the flesh of the pig, that over which is taken the name of someone other than God, that which is strangled to death, that which receives a fatal blow, that which has fallen to its death, that which is butted to death, and that which predators have eaten of—except that which you have properly slaughtered—and that which is immolated at altars; and that you should take portions by means of casting arrows. This is a sinful transgression. Today, those who have disbelieved have despaired of your religion, so do not fear them, but fear Me. Today, I have perfected your religion for you, I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved of Islam as your religion. So, toward the one who is compelled in extreme hunger—but without having any inclination toward sin—God is Very Forgiving, Very Merciful.

The language of the Qur'an has a notable ring of Divine authority. *Allah,* the Arabic word for God, occurs about 2,700 times in the Qur'an, often several times on every page. This means that God has, literally, a ubiquitous presence in the pages of the Qur'an—a linguistic counterpart, one might say, of the theological doctrine of Divine omnipresence. Furthermore, even though the Qur'an quotes many speakers—including both good figures like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus and evil figures like Satan and Pharaoh—the

entire Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be the Speech of God, and, therefore, technically, God is the only speaker in the Qur'an. The God of the Qur'an sometimes speaks in the first person—in the singular or in the plural (in the latter case, it is the plural of majesty rather than the numerical plural)—and sometimes in the third person. But always it is in an authoritative voice that is unmistakable, whether that voice describes, explicates, analyzes, comments, praises, chides, promises, threatens, foretells, or reminds. This voice contributes in no small way to creating solemnity, which is a major characteristic of the Islamic scripture.

The best guide to the meaning of the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. As has been noted above, the Qur'an returns to its main themes again and again. In doing so, however, it usually makes variations on the themes, approaching them from somewhat different angles, furnishing more details where only a little was supplied before, responding to certain issues that might have arisen from an earlier account, or citing a parable to illustrate or reinforce a point already made. Very often, the Qur'an breaks up a story—that of a prophet or a previous nation, for example—into several portions and presents one portion of it in one *sura,* another in a second *sura,* and so on. Only that portion of a story that is relevant to a theme under discussion in a *sura* will be presented in that *sura*. Consequently, a full understanding of the story would require that the various parts of the story be put together in a logical sequence. Studying one part of the Qur'an, therefore, necessarily involves studying other parts of it.

The importance of studying Classical Arabic for understanding and interpreting the Qur'an has already been hinted at. The prime source of the Arabic of the Qur'an is pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, a deep study of which yields insights into the vocabulary, idioms, images, and structures that form the background to the language of the Qur'an. Also important for Qur'anic interpretation is knowledge of the sayings and conduct of Muhammad, such knowledge being gained through the body of Prophetic reports known as *Hadith* (literally, "event," "news," or "report"), which, for the sake of convenience, we may call the Word of Muhammad. *Hadith* is especially useful for the explication of the legal and ethical content of the Qur'an. As one would expect, a vast amount of exegetical and other types of material on the Qur'an exists in Islamic tradition and is continuously being augmented. It goes without saying that a sound knowledge of this scholarly tradition is key to understanding the Qur'an at more than a superficial level.

The foregoing discussion should not be taken to imply that the Qur'an is a closed book, in the sense that only a select few have the right to interpret it. Since there is no priesthood in Islam, the door of Qur'anic interpretation is, theoretically, open to anyone who brings the necessary qualifications to the task. Today, most Muslims would agree on the need for a fresh and creative interpretation of the Qur'an, but such interpretation will have credibility only if it is authentic and responsible.

The Qur'an occupies an important place in the lives of Muslims. It has given rise to certain artistic disciplines, notably calligraphy and Qur'an chanting. The walls and arches of many mosques in the Muslim world are adorned by beautifully inscribed Qur'anic verses, and, even in this age of computers and printers, calligraphic copies of the Qur'an are readily available in Muslim countries. Qur'an chanting, or *tajwid,* is an art that may take a few years to perfect. Regularly held international *tajwid* competitions for men and women have enabled the public across the Muslim world to appreciate this art. In many Muslim countries, children learn to read the Qur'an at an early age. Reading the Qur'an at this stage means learning to read the Arabic script. Since the scripts of some Islamic languages are Arabic based, the ability to read the Arabic script of the Qur'an gives children, in certain cases, facility to read their own language. At any rate, early exposure to the Qur'an creates in children an attachment to the Holy Scripture and to the Isamic religion.

In the West, the field of Qur'anic studies has registered notable growth in the last two decades. In English and other languages, several new translations of the Qur'an have appeared, many scholarly works have been published, and popular expositions have not lagged behind. Still, one feels that this foundational text of Islam has not received the same attention that the political and social history of Islam has. Much exegetical material from the classical period is still in manuscript form, only a relatively small number of scholars are engaged in study of the Qur'an, and despite the production of several edited volumes—especially the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,*[4] to which scholars from all over the world have contributed—close collaborative work between Muslim and Western scholars has yet to occur. However, the study of the Qur'an is likely to receive a boost from the continuing growth of the larger discipline of Islamic studies, and one can hope that the coming years will bring greater recognition of the importance of the Qur'an not only as a subject of interest in itself but also as a lived reality in Muslim life, thus necessitating study of that lived reality in all its variety.

NOTES

1. A short bibliography of works on the Qur'an may be provided here. For general introductory accounts, see Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an,* revised and enlarged by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), and Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002). On the textual history of the Qur'an, see M.M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003). Two useful thematic studies of the Qur'an are Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2001). See also Helmut Gätje, ed., *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical*

and Modern Muslim Interpretations, translated by Alford T. Welch (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996; repr. 1976 Routledge edition). For the stylistic and literary aspects of the Qur'an, see, besides Abdel Haleem's above-quoted work, Issa J. Boullata, *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000). See also Mustansir Mir, "The Language of the Qur'an," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell Books, forthcoming). Two relatively advanced studies of exegetical, historical, and other aspects of the Qur'an are *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), and G.R. Hawting and Abdul Kader A. Shareef, eds. *Approaches to the Qur'an* (London: Routledge, 1993). *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001–2005) is an indispensable work for a wide variety of Qur'anic subjects. In the text above, I have given my own translations of the Qur'anic material cited.

2. Since the Muslims are members of a well-knit brotherhood, those who make cutting remarks about other Muslims in effect make such remarks about themselves.

3. The Arabs compared backbiting to eating the flesh of the victim, who was likened to a carcass that was being picked at by the predatory backbiter.

4. See note 1 above.

5

Drunkenness of the Word

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

Drunkenness of the Word, you ignite the nations
    as nothing else can, a flame of
        sculpted stars carried from
            arena to arena, whisper

made by a solitary singer in a vacant lot in the
spotlight of the full moon in his

uprise, rung by rung, from trashy mortality,
head dazed by successive different colors of halo
to the most celestial dimensions until,

eyes just at the level of vaporizing clouds,
he catches sight of his goal and is
transformed into a fixed aerial body

that comes back singing, and walks through the
marketplace buying a pound of figs, a dried fish,
    a trowelful of almonds, bunches of bananas and
    a pot-scraper made of wood-shavings
        somehow held together.

In the most windless place, in the shadow of the
    dunes of doom,
O Word made alive by our
    pronunciation of you
        unawares, you flower all of a sudden into

forests inhabited by prismatic birds whose
flight breaks light into the

primary colors and
spreads their sheen on the
broad leaves of our
private pleas!

Word of Love, cry out of desperation,
word half-spoken, the other half
caught in the heart,
word like a groundhog checking the
length of its shadow before fully
emerging, song,
solitude's antique chorus
that, each time the lips form it,
is polished anew and
emerges bronze and perfectly ticking
with open face and
solid footing.

We are reversed in our lives
until the Word speaks us
and faces us forward
into the spray of the cascade of its
meaning always coming toward us

from above sea-level where the Source of all
words and The Word itself

high atop a tower of Light
sends it down fully
propelled for the
journey.

8 Ramadan

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *The Ramadan Sonnets* (San Francisco and Bethesda, Maryland: Jusoor/City Lights Books, 1996). Reprinted from Jusoor/City Lights Books and republished in the Ecstatic Exchange Series. This poem is reproduced here by permission of the author.

6

Encountering the Qur'an: Contexts and Approaches

James Winston Morris

Virtually nothing that one may encounter in the great high-cultural achievements of Islamic civilization, or within the hundreds of distinctive localized Muslim cultures, can be fully understood without a profound knowledge of the Qur'an and the multitude of ways it has been understood and interpreted. Indeed most of the Islamic humanities, in all their endlessly creative and evolving manifestations, can be understood as efforts to communicate effectively and to translate into realized human form, the teachings and unique forms of the Arabic Qur'an. Against this vast historical panorama, the purpose of this chapter is more modest: to prepare interested lay readers, with access only to a single reliable English version of the Qur'an and to a few essential reference works, to begin to explore and appreciate those dimensions of the Arabic Qur'an that have so constantly shaped and colored the manifold forms of Islamic cultures and civilization.

The contexts, cautions, and practical guidelines that are briefly outlined in this chapter are based on several decades of accumulated experience in introducing the Qur'an to English-speaking audiences, primarily young university students interested in Religious Studies and different world-religious traditions. What this experience has repeatedly taught me is that the greatest obstacles to any serious appreciation of the Qur'an on its own terms and in traditional Islamic cultural contexts usually come from a shared body of unconscious, normally taken-for-granted cultural assumptions about the nature, language, and assumed uses of the translated English Bible (and hence of "scripture" in general). The unconscious assumptions that guide novice readers—and too often English translators of the Qur'an as well—are rooted in a set of very specific formative historical experiences and implicit conceptions of religion that is shared by Anglo-Saxon (and mostly Protestant) cultures in North America and elsewhere. For the same reason, Muslim

translators of the Qur'an into English have so far, almost without exception, continued to pay little attention to the "receiving" role of the relevant mentalities and to the assumptions of their non-Muslim audiences in the process of communication.[1]

The Arabic Qur'an is different in a number of fundamental ways from everything that non-Muslim English readers normally associate with reading "a book." Equally important, the Arabic Qur'an continues to be present and to function in the lives of the vast majority of Muslims—just as it has throughout the past millennium or more—in specific ways that are often strikingly different compared with English-speaking readers, who tend to associate with the normal approaches to the English Bible. For these reasons, I begin by briefly outlining some of the most important contexts in which the Arabic Qur'an remains present in the lives and experiences of Muslims everywhere. These contexts are normally private and familial (hence socially invisible) for Muslims in Western cultures, but they are often more public wherever Muslims are historically a majority or significant minority of the population. I then suggest ways in which students can begin to move from a reliable English translation of the Qur'an toward a deeper appreciation of the complex meanings actually conveyed by the original Arabic.

THE PRESENCE OF THE QUR'AN

The root meaning of the word *Qur'an,* as it has historically been understood, is "recitation," and the weight of historical evidence likewise suggests that the oral recitation of the revelations of the Qur'an, from the very beginning, formed an essential part of the liturgical acts of personal and communal prayers in Islam. This was certainly the primary context of use and transmission of the Qur'an prior to the subsequent efforts of recording, collection, codification, and the even longer evolution of the current forms of Arabic orthography. Hence the recited and *aural* presence of the Qur'an—whether in the ritual prayer or in a host of other contexts—has remained the primary way in which Muslims have initially encountered the Holy Book, whether or not they can actually understand and interpret the Arabic vocabulary of the Qur'an. This is true above all for non-Arabic-speaking Muslims, who have formed the great majority of Muslims throughout the world since at least the twelfth century of the Common Era.[2] Because this aural, quasi-musical dimension of the Qur'an as recitation is so fundamental, and since recordings of excellent Qur'an reciters are now readily available in all digital media and over the Internet, no one who can access good-quality recitations should begin to read an English translation of the Qur'an without first listening at length to a range of different reciters and forms of recitation.[3] I have repeatedly witnessed

among students of many ages and cultural backgrounds that the immediate power and effectiveness of the properly recited Qur'an is palpable to anyone, often to the point of spontaneous tears, as the Qur'an itself notes (Qur'an 5:83).[4] For the beginning student otherwise limited to an English translation of the Qur'an, the awakened awareness of this immediately accessible, hauntingly memorable dimension of the Qur'an is a potent antidote to the repeated obstacles and misunderstandings faced by anyone who then goes on to explore those versions of the Qur'an that are so far available in English.

Hearing the Qur'an

Traditionally, a small but symbolically key portion of the Qur'an (either the *Basmalla* or *Surat al-Fatiha*)[5] is the first thing spoken into the ear of a newborn Muslim baby and the last thing heard by someone dying. This audible presence of the spoken or recited Qur'an carries on through the whole life cycle of ritual and liturgical occasions outlined below. However, the highly public nature of many of these liturgical occasions in predominantly Muslim cultures means that the recited Qur'an tends to become a virtually omnipresent public background even for everyday, nonliturgical life. This fact is true to an almost equal extent even in most non-Arabic Muslim areas of the world, from West Africa to Indonesia or the Hui Muslim neighborhoods of China's cities. Indeed, the recent mass availability of electronic and digital media has meant that recorded forms of the recited Qur'an are now almost universally accessible and audible anywhere one goes in the Islamic world: from public markets, a taxi driver's cassette or CD player, various portable media players, and dedicated television channels (now on local cable outlets in the West) to the selections of Qur'an recitation normally available on the airlines of every Muslim country. Thus, in recent years, the audible presence of the Arabic Qur'an has expanded far beyond its traditional liturgical contexts.

In addition, the centrality of the actual sounds and rhythms of the Qur'an is mirrored in diverse local forms of music, poetry, and rhythmic recitation that are often included under the central Qur'anic rubric of *dhikr,* the infinitely varied prayerful "recollection, remembrance and repetition" of the divine Reality. Forms of *dhikr* are included almost everywhere among the preeminent forms of the local Islamic humanities, both in popular and in more learned, elite contexts.[6] Whether in Arabic or in other Islamic languages such as Persian or Urdu, the richly innovative forms of spiritual music and poetry are inseparable from the constant archetypal inspirations—both symbolic and more concretely poetic and rhythmic—of the aural Qur'an, often in ways that are so self-evident that they remain virtually unconscious among the cultures concerned.

Seeing the Qur'an: The Sacred Presence of the Arabic Script

Throughout history, the assimilation of Islam within a new cultural or linguistic context has been marked by the practice of writing the local language in the sacred Arabic script of the Qur'an. This process has provided a kind of consonantal shorthand that has been adapted for more than 30 different languages. One of the bases of this phenomenon was the insistence of Muslim parents on creating locally adapted primary Qur'an schools (*maktab*) or tutoring facilities for very young children (primary age or even younger). These schools provided an initiation into the recitation of at least the minimal number of Qur'anic verses needed to perform the ritual prayers, along with some basic skills in writing and recognizing the sacred Arabic text. This initiation normally occurred at an age before what were, until very recently, the demanding and expensive processes of formal instruction and full literacy in Qur'anic Arabic or the written forms of the local vernacular languages.[7] Thus, in many areas outside of the Arab world, the recent introduction of alternative (Romanized or Cyrillic) alphabets by colonial or modern reformist powers, or even the outright suppression of formal Islamic education under Communist regimes, has gone hand-in-hand with the elimination of this once widespread proto-literacy in the basic elements of Qur'anic Arabic.

Despite these negative developments, the visual presence of the Arabic sacred alphabet of the Qur'an has remained important everywhere Muslims live. Some of the most familiar public manifestations of Qur'anic Arabic are in architectural settings, since most public buildings were funded by religious foundations until very recent times. Mosques, schools, tombs, shrines, hospitals, kitchens for the poor, and places of pilgrimage are filled with calligraphy and tiled versions of the divine names, invocations, and passages of the Qur'an. The same visual and symbolic imagery is also reflected, in tribal and domestic contexts, in prayer rugs and other carpets and textile arts. At a deeper and often more religiously significant level, the visual and symbolic (including literary) iconography of the traditional Islamic humanities is thoroughly pervaded by calligraphy and other types of Qur'anic symbolism.

Of course, Western artistic and literary traditions have also been shaped by equally wide-ranging Biblical influences. However, the Qur'anic equivalents of these manifestations, and their complex historical pathways of creativity and transformation, are usually invisible to non-Muslim (and unfortunately, even to many Western-educated Muslim) viewers. To take only one example: the colors of the four Qur'anic elements, which are inseparable from their symbolic eschatological and metaphysical associations in the Qur'an, have often implicitly determined the color schemes of religious structures, paintings, calligraphy, and other visual arts throughout the Islamic world. Hence, one encounters the relative rarity of red (symbolizing the infernal Fire), and the corresponding insistence on the blue of the spiritual heavens, or the even more pervasive presence of green, associated with the Water of Life/Spirit/

Prophethood and the complex spiritual symbolism of vegetation and the eschatological Gardens and streams repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an. Likewise, no Muslim familiar with the Qur'an can encounter a prayer-niche or the lamps of any mosque without experiencing an immediate resonance with the elaborate metaphysical imagery of the famous Light Verses of the Qur'an (Qur'an 24:35–38).

Another quasi-liturgical motif is the importance of Arabic calligraphy across all Muslim cultures. This constitutes the most revered form of the visual arts, so that the practice of calligraphy may become a demanding spiritual discipline that begins in childhood and unfolds throughout life. The sacred role of Arabic calligraphy also includes, by extension, the similarly central role (both artistically and economically) of the "arts of the book" in Islam, from gilding, paper-making, marbling, and leather-working to the actual masterpieces of Islamicate poetry and miniature painting that such arts help communicate and illuminate. Much the same is true, on an even wider scale, of the role of Arabic script in the textile arts, which have often been economically central to premodern cultures and economies, or in the related arts of jewelry, metalworking, and glass.

In addition to the centrality of the Arabic script wherever it is still used as the script for official national languages, the script of the Qur'an is a personal marker of religious identity in private and familial contexts. This begins with the prominent display in most Muslim homes of framed calligraphy of the Qur'an, as well as divine names, prayers, or other distinctive religious images (the Ka'ba in Mecca, and so on), along with the special reverence accorded to familial copies of the Qur'an. On an even more private and intimate level, Muslims in many parts of the world wear amulets engraved with short lines or verses of the Qur'an—especially the *Basmalla,* the *Fatiha,* or the Throne Verse (Qur'an 2:255)—or seal rings engraved with the shorter Qur'anic phrases or the names of key sacred figures, or they carry prayer beads often embossed with divine names or similar Qur'anic expressions. Yet again, none of these omnipresent visual reflections of the Arabic Qur'an, in either their spiritual–aesthetic, symbolic, or social dimensions, are tied to or dependent upon prior literary knowledge of the Qur'an and its meanings.

Experiencing the Qur'an: Ritual and Liturgical Contexts

The liturgical presence of the Qur'an, which combines its near-universal aural and visual presence with active recitation in various forms of prayer and divine remembrance, is central to the three basic ritual cycles shared by virtually all forms of Islam, as well as to many other aspects of everyday life. These ritual cycles include the life cycle from birth to death, the daily individual cycle of the various forms of prayer (necessarily involving Qur'anic Arabic), and the annual public cycle of holy days and months, which has

significant local and sectarian variations. In each of these situations, prior to the recent availability of printed Qur'anic texts[8] and the even more recent invention of sound recording, there was a virtually universal need—already emphasized in the earliest Hadith and historical accounts—for highly trained, spiritually effective local reciters of the Qur'an, as well as for widespread memorization of the text, given the rarity of handwritten texts in premodern times. Thus, one finds throughout the Muslim world elaborate traditional systems for training in memorization, as well as even more complex training institutions and rules governing the formal recitation of the Qur'an.[9]

In traditional and long-standing Muslim cultures, however, the presence of the Arabic Qur'an is most immediately visible not in what we usually think of as formally religious rituals but in a host of smaller customary activities that are so omnipresent as to be virtually automatic and unconscious. These include the everyday usage of the cautionary phrase "if God wills" (*In sha' Allah,* based on a Qur'anic injunction) after any reference to future actions or eventualities, the even more widespread recitation of the *Basmalla* (the formula "In the Name of God, the All-Loving, the All-Compassionate" which opens all but one of the chapters of the Qur'an) or of the opening *Surat al-Fatiha* (Qur'an 1:1–7) before eating or initiating virtually any action, the recitation of the *Fatiha* or another prayer formula when passing by places of burial, the automatic recitation of standard Qur'anically based blessings after any mention of Muhammad or other prophets and holy figures, or the widespread use of prayer beads for recitation of Qur'anic formulae of the divine names and other invocations. One could also include in this category rules for the specially reverential treatment accorded to the written Arabic text (*mushaf*) of the Qur'an, both in public places and within the home. The text of the Qur'an is normally accorded a place of high dignity, often with a distinctive reading-stand, and should never be touched or opened without special ablutions, intentions, and purification, as in the standard preparations for the ritual prayer itself.

In terms of the major rituals shared across most Muslim cultures and sects, the recitation of the Qur'an—either in elaborate public, communal forms in more traditional cultures or in more private or familial forms in Western settings—is central to many rituals associated with the Muslim life cycle. Rituals involving recitation of the Qur'an lead from birth through name giving, circumcision, the daily practice of ritual prayer, betrothal and marriage, and grave illness and death, with special prayers associated with funeral rituals. The performance of the daily cycle of five ritual prayers presupposes the memorization and faultless recitation of at least several shorter Suras of the Qur'an, as well as related ritual formulae of blessings, thanks, and petitionary prayer also in Qur'anic Arabic. Thus, a child is considered sufficiently responsible to begin performing the daily prayers only when she can correctly memorize a sufficient number of Qur'anic passages.

Although the individual recitation of this Qur'anic repertoire might take on a somewhat routine character within the daily performance of the ritual prayers, the communal performance of the prayer, whether at the Friday noon prayer or in other group settings, provides occasions when the prayer leader (*imam*) will expose the worshipper to other, less familiar sections of the Qur'an. In addition, the rules of the ritual prayer itself allow each individual to expand and include passages of the Qur'an almost indefinitely. One result of this constantly expanding, lifelong process of familiarization and recollection of the Qur'an is that the Muslim is gradually led and prepared to discover—often in the very process of praying itself—the spiritual connections between the experiences of one's own life and the corresponding lessons and insights conveyed by verses of the Qur'an. Significantly, both the individual verses of the Qur'an and the nearly infinite phenomena of creation, including all human experience, are described in the Qur'an by the same Arabic term: *ayat,* or ''divine Signs.'' As one can see when visiting mosques almost anywhere in the world, the completion of the ritual prayer is often the prelude to individual or group recitation of traditional Arabic litanies (drawn from the Qur'an and the Prophetic sayings) of prayer and recollection, known as *dhikr.*

While Muslim societies all have important holy days and related ritual events in which Qur'anic recitation and prayer play an important role, the importance of the Qur'an is particularly heightened during the fasting month of Ramadan, which is closely associated in many Prophetic traditions with the revelation of the Qur'an itself. Thus, during the evenings of Ramadan, special *Tarawih* prayers and the public recitation of portions of the Qur'an are part of emotionally moving rituals. At the same time, Muslims are enjoined to make a special effort to read the entire text of the Qur'an—traditionally in the original Arabic, although very recently in translated versions—during the month of Ramadan. This period is typically devoted to heightened contemplation and withdrawal from the routines and distractions of normal daily life.

Cultural and Intellectual Dimensions: The Qur'an in the Religious Sciences and the Islamic Humanities

For more than a millennium, whenever Muslims have sought to understand the meaning and teachings of the Qur'an, they have not turned to translations, but to the study of the Arabic Qur'an itself. The demanding intellectual study of the Qur'an, whatever its original guiding motivations—whether legal, theological, spiritual, or political—has always been mediated. That is to say, such study has normally been embedded within a complex web of traditional interpretive perspectives and assumptions that are profoundly interrelated, even when particular traditions may articulate very

different conclusions and notions of scriptural authority. Two essential, and necessarily complementary, dimensions have been associated with this ongoing mediating process: the inherited complex of the traditional Arabic religious sciences and the omnipresent, constantly evolving influence of locally adapted popular forms of the Islamic humanities. However, neither of these dimensions is readily accessible to nonspecialist Western students who approach the Qur'an through translations. Even more important, as intimated above, the parameters of these Islamic contextual and hermeneutic traditions rarely correspond to the assumptions today's Western-educated students normally have about the nature and expected uses of the Bible, or indeed of books and scriptures more generally.

To begin with, the serious intellectual study of the actual meanings of the Qur'an—in contrast to the different ritual contexts summarized above—presupposes, even for native Arabic speakers, years of dedicated study of the uniquely complex language and symbolic vocabulary of the Qur'an. This is a demanding process of familiarization with the text of the Qur'an that is quite different from rote memorization. As a result, scholarly preparation for actually understanding the Qur'an has for centuries been the preserve of a relatively small—usually urban and male—learned elite.[10] Even more important, this basic initiation into the intellectual study of the meanings and depths of the Qur'an has required, since the earliest Islamic centuries, the equally demanding mastery of a number of related preparatory and interpretive religious sciences requiring years of preparation. These essential contextual disciplines include the following: Qur'anic grammar and syntax, Arabic lexicography and philology, Qur'anic rhetoric (*balagha*), Prophetic Hadith, Islamic sacred and Prophetic history (*sira, ta'rikh,* and *qisas al-anbiya'*), specialized literatures illuminating the historical contexts of Qur'anic revelations (*asbab al-nuzul* and *tafsir*), dialectical theology (*kalam*), and the principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*). Even today, reliable scholarly writing about the Qur'an and its interpretation necessarily presupposes an informed awareness of the structures, procedures, and sources of this historically accumulated body of related Arabic intellectual disciplines.

Because of these historical and intellectual factors, traditional Muslim cultures and their scholastic representatives, even today, have rarely admitted a religiously significant role for independent vernacular translations of the Arabic Qur'an. Just as important, one does not find any significant movement arguing for the sort of independent, highly individualized scriptural interpretation, based uniquely on such vernacular translations, that modern readers tend to take for granted when they think about religion. As any student of Islam quickly discovers, the locally operative forms of each Muslim's religious beliefs and practices have almost unimaginably complex and diverse historical roots and sources, and those actual religious realities can rarely be understood as somehow "dictated" by a particular verse or passage in a translated Qur'an.

Instead, the locally prevalent forms of Islam in a traditional Muslim setting normally reflect those Islamic humanities that have illuminated and elaborated, in a locally meaningful way, the central ethical and spiritual teachings of the Qur'an.[11] When we look more closely at the historical origins of the Islamic humanities, their most influential exponents were often highly learned scholars and poets who sought to communicate the essential teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith (as mediated by the traditional religious disciplines) to wider Muslim audiences living in extremely diverse linguistic and cultural settings. This recurrent creative sociocultural process of interpretive communication of the Qur'an is already well illustrated by the relationship between the Qur'an and the thousands of Prophetic teachings recorded in the collections of Hadith. Many of these sayings take the form of the Prophet's particular interpretation or concrete application of abstract, symbolic Qur'anic concepts in more accessible language or through memorable stories and imagery more directly meaningful for different questioners and audiences.

In short, although the traditional complex of Arabic religious sciences that earlier scholars developed to study and interpret the Qur'an necessarily remain the domain of a handful of intellectual specialists, the manifold expressions of the Islamic humanities have continued to provide other, often strikingly effective tools for conveying the meanings of the Qur'an to much wider popular audiences. Indeed, their spiritual, moral, and cultural effectiveness have been demonstrated over many centuries, especially through the complex creative passages from one Islamicate language or culture into new cultural and linguistic settings. So Western students who wish to grasp the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the Qur'an are often well advised to begin their study with such proven masterpieces of cross-cultural translation and communication as the readily available English translations of Jalal al-Din Rumi's *Masnavi,* Farid al-Din 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds,* and a rapidly expanding body of other forms of the Islamic humanities, including spiritual music and traditional visual arts. Such historically effective creative means of expressing and communicating the meanings of the Qur'an have been intimately shaped by many of the unique qualities of the language and symbolism of the Qur'an that are introduced below.

STUDYING THE QUR'AN IN ENGLISH

Students approaching the Qur'an in English have literally dozens of translations available now, with several new versions and related introductory studies appearing each year.[12] Such efforts of translation usually reflect a contrasting set of motives. Some seek to render more adequately the undeniably powerful beauty of the original Arabic Qur'an, with its unique magic of sound, imagery, and poetic rhythms.[13] Others seek to communicate what

their translators consider the Qur'an's theological dimensions of meaning or right belief, whether through an emphasis on particular types of interpretation (sectarian, scientistic, or apologetic) or by incorporation of, for first-time readers, more of the complex dimensions of traditional historical and contextual scholarship discussed above.[14] Still others, like many contemporary Bible translators, strive to communicate something of the Qur'an in more popularly accessible, "easy-reading" narrative prose.

However, the suggestions, cautions, and interpretive guidelines suggested here relate to another, quite different and specifically pedagogical motive: How can students limited to the English language begin to discover the underlying meanings of the Arabic Qur'an? This kind of informed contextual understanding is indispensable for grasping the underlying connections between the unique structures of the Qur'an, on the one hand, and their subsequent interpretive unfolding throughout the two key dimensions of Islamic civilization we have just discussed, on the other hand: that is, the learned disciplines of the traditional Arabic religious sciences, and their endless creative manifestations in the Islamic humanities. This educational motive likewise reflects the pedagogically obstinate reality that the Arabic Qur'an itself is anything but easy reading, without even considering the further problems introduced by translation. At least as much as any other classical text a student is likely to encounter, the Qur'an is very challenging to understand—although the effort required to appreciate it is also revealing and rewarding, so long as its intrinsic difficulties and resulting interpretive potentials are openly recognized from the outset.

For this pedagogical purpose, there is so far no substitute for A. J. Arberry's *The Qur'an Interpreted,* despite the misunderstandings that are frequently generated by Arberry's recourse to quasi-Biblical (King James) English vocabulary. For study purposes, Hanna Kassis's *A Concordance of the Qur'an,* [15] provides an indispensable tool for opening up the distinctive semantic possibilities of the Arabic Qur'an, since it relates every word of Arberry's English translation to its underlying triliteral Arabic roots and thematic interconnections. The careful use of this concordance enables students using the Arberry translation to quickly locate all the scattered passages involving a particular Arabic root (or wider semantic field) that express and develop a common symbolic theme. Just as with music, this underlying thematic–symbolic structure, which is initially invisible or only dimly discernible in English translation, is the most basic key to discovering the multifaceted meanings and intentions of the Qur'an. Finally, the new multivolume *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (supplemented by the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*) provides helpful explanations of the Qur'an's many unfamiliar references, contexts, and literary forms in short entries that are readily understandable by nonspecialists.[16]

Since the problems encountered when students first approach the Qur'an in English differ according to each individual and the particular passages

and problems the student may encounter, it is difficult to propose a single logical order of exposition that would integrate all of the cautions and suggestions that may be helpful to different readers. For this reason, the following observations have been divided into three sections, beginning with a series of fundamental considerations that apply to almost every reader of the translated Qur'an. These are followed by some helpful basic interpretive principles drawn from the Qur'an itself, as well as from a wide range of classical Muslim interpreters. The final section concludes with immediately accessible unifying themes that are central to interpreting the Qur'an. It should be kept in mind that some of the following suggestions are intended for students who are trying to understand the Qur'an as a whole, which requires demanding study and much time for beginning readers. But most of these points deal with fundamental themes and literary features that can be grasped through study and meditation on a few carefully chosen Suras, something that many students are already trained to do in the analysis of poetry, for example. This kind of close, repeated reading and empathetic, comparative study of shorter passages is most effective and rewarding for those readers who can devote only limited time to the study of the Qur'an.[17]

Initial Cautions and Considerations

Historical Contexts

Perhaps the most basic consideration that any beginning reader of the translated Qur'an must keep in mind is the radically different situations of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers during the earlier (Meccan) and later (Medinan) periods of the revelation of the Qur'an. The original audiences and aims of different Suras intricately reflect this fundamental contrast between the Prophet's spiritual guidance of a handful of often persecuted devotees during the initial Meccan period of his teaching, on the one hand, and the complexly evolving, much more publicly social and political situation throughout his leadership of the nascent Muslim community in the oasis city of Yathrib, later known as *al-Madina* (The City [of the Prophet]), on the other hand.[18] While the scholarship of traditional Muslims and modern philologists differs in many ways about where to situate chronologically particular Suras and verses in this chronology, what is most important for anyone approaching the Qur'an for the first time is to begin by focusing on those Suras—primarily located in the second half of English translations—that are normally accepted to be Meccan. This is because these earlier Suras do not pose the complex issues of relevant historical interpretive contexts and often highly problematic assumptions that are unavoidably raised by the recurrent theological, social, legal, and political issues that readers must be aware of throughout the later, Medinan Suras.

Muhammad's role, as reflected in the Meccan Suras, is that of a preacher, guide, and warner leading a threatened and initially quite small group of highly devoted monotheists in a hostile pagan city. In that early context, the revealed teachings of the Qur'an focus vividly on a recurrent set of metaphysical and spiritual concerns. These include the awareness of the reality and manifold attributes of the One God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe; the teaching of humankind's spiritual origin and ultimate destiny and Judgment; and the appropriate ethical and spiritual responsibilities within that metaphysical context. These same metaphysical and spiritual concerns continue to pervade and inform the later, Medinan sections of the Qur'an. However in this later period, many verses of the Qur'an also refer to the Prophet's increasing role in leading and shaping a much larger and increasingly distinct socioreligious community that was constantly engaged in a military and political struggle for survival. The Medinan Suras therefore reflect the challenging circumstances and motivations of markedly different groups of supporters (and enemies) during a period in which the nascent Muslim community gradually became differentiated from surrounding religious group in both its prescribed practices and its ethical and spiritual norms.

A significant problem for readers approaching the Qur'an is that there are no contemporary historical sources that independently describe the complex local events that are constantly alluded to in these later, Medinan Suras. Instead, the traditional contextual materials that were elaborated by the scholarly Arabic disciplines in subsequent generations frequently reflect later theological, sectarian, and political concerns and assumptions. Such visibly later historical concerns include, for example, the bloody intra-Muslim civil wars and sectarian divisions that marked the century following the Prophet's death; the elaboration of different theological, juridical, and political schools of interpretation; and the complex challenges involved in relating the Qur'an to the vast body of Hadith portraying the Prophet's teaching and example that accumulated in the following centuries.

The unavoidable pedagogical problem posed by the later, Medinan verses for all readers of the Qur'an (even in the original Arabic) is therefore twofold. First, there is no way to reliably summarize all of the problematic historical contexts and corresponding interpretive assumptions in a simple and value-neutral way. Even a brief glance at the relevant scholarly literature makes clear how much each traditional interpretive approach remains essentially hypothetical and dependent on selective readings of historically later evidence. Second, Qur'an translations or commentaries that supply simplified, highly selective versions of the events in question almost inevitably lead English-speaking readers to approach the Medinan Suras as they would the more familiar "historical" or "legal" books of the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately, such an approach tends to prevent students from grasping what in fact remains central to most later strands of Muslim Qur'an interpretation.

Rather than focusing on Medinan events simply as remote "sacred history," traditional Muslim exegetes have often highlighted the ways in which these exemplary tensions and conflicts, and the challenging ethical and spiritual issues they raise, provide archetypal situations illustrating the Qur'an's perennial ethical, practical, and metaphysical teachings. To take but one key example: the many Medinan verses referring to the "hypocrites" in the Meccan period are often understood as reflecting recurrent spiritual dilemmas that in fact all human beings necessarily encounter in the course of discovering and deepening their faith. For reasons such as these, beginning students of the Qur'an are well advised to first develop their familiarity and understanding of the Meccan Suras. Engaging the problematic historical contexts of the Medinan Suras requires a degree of well-informed, appropriately balanced tutorial guidance that is not yet fully available in English sources.

Order and Structure

Moving on to the even more fundamental issue of overall form and structure, any beginning reader of a translated Qur'an needs to take account of the manifold ways in which the Arabic Qur'an is different from what we ordinarily think of as a "book." To begin with, as already highlighted above, according to traditional accounts the initial revelations were first *recited* and then recorded, in accordance with the initially intermittent form in which they were revealed. Thus, the current written arrangement and order of Suras and their constitutive verses is generally acknowledged, even by most Muslim authorities, to have been codified at a historically later stage. This later codification process is reflected in the traditional names (included in most Arabic printed texts and many translated versions) of Suras, in the standard division of particular verses within Suras, and in the traditional designation of certain Suras as being either Meccan or Medinan.

The traditional order of the codified Suras—with the exception of *al-Fatiha*, the short "opening" Sura whose central liturgical role in Islam has already been discussed—is primarily based on their relative length. Hence traditional study and memorization of the Qur'an normally begins with the shortest Suras and then moves toward the longest ones.[19] While there is no pretense of a strictly chronological organization, the longest Suras tend to be from the later, Medinan period. Thus readers in English can safely begin at the "back" of the translated Qur'an, as already suggested, with the many shorter Suras that are almost entirely from the earlier, Meccan period.

Readers of the Qur'an in translation need to keep in mind that neither the Sura numbers nor the apparent "titles" of Suras provided in translations (these are simple mnemonic words that were used at a very early stage to identify a particular group of verses) should be considered part of the originally revealed Qur'anic text. Likewise, the original Arabic of the Qur'an is

devoid of the familiar markers of punctuation, paragraphs, and capitalization that translators so helpfully—and often misleadingly—supply in English. Nor do the traditional verse designations necessarily reflect actual divisions of meaning or subject, since they often derive instead from recurring end rhymes in the original recited Arabic. This characteristic lack of punctuation in the original Arabic can lead to significant issues of interpretation. For example, in a number of cases involving important theological and juridical matters, the Qur'anic text can be read and understood in quite different ways, depending on where the reader chooses to make a stop when reading a verse or sentence. Equally important, the Arabic of the Qur'an includes, as a distinctive and constantly recurring structural feature, highly ambiguous pronoun references, with each alternative reading yielding different, yet often remarkably revealing sets of meanings. This striking feature is almost never reflected in English translations of the Qur'an, apart from the standard use of capitalization to indicate apparently "divine" references. This is particularly unfortunate, since this characteristic indeterminacy of pronouns—and the multiple alternative meanings to which it gives rise—is one of the many highly distinctive features of Qur'anic rhetoric and literary structure that was later carried over into the mystical poetic traditions of the Islamic humanities in Persian and other languages.

For the beginning reader, the importance of these characteristic Qur'anic features of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and multiple meanings is that translations ignoring such points deprive the student of the challenge of discerning multiple perspectives of meaning in the sacred text, which is so central to the experience of discovering the Arabic Qur'an. To put this more plainly, the result of such neglect, for readers relying on a translation of the Qur'an, is roughly comparable to the difference between reading Plato's *Republic* or Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* in the original and in a condensed *Cliff Notes* study guide version.

The "Literal" is Intrinsically Symbolic

Virtually nothing in the Arabic Qur'an has a straightforward and prosaic meaning. The problematic and explicitly symbolic nature of the key expressions of the Qur'an is constantly highlighted and developed in Suras from all periods, perhaps most dramatically in the mystifying language of the earliest short eschatological Suras, which are normally found at the end of English translations. In Arabic, the uniquely mysterious, open-ended quality of Qur'anic language is particularly apparent when one compares the unique Arabic idiom of the Qur'an with the simpler and more understandable language of the Prophet's sayings (Hadith), which indeed are often responses to his followers' requests to clarify the unfamiliar symbols and vocabulary of the Qur'an. The texts of the Hadith, originally transmitted orally, are in a far more accessible, often prosaic, form of Arabic, whose rhetorical

and structural qualities are quite different from the unique rhetoric of the Qur'an.

Thus the reader of the Qur'an needs to pay close attention to those passages that repeatedly refer to its central assumption of the existence of multiple, often sharply contrasted, degrees of spiritual understanding. This basic human reality is reflected throughout the Qur'an in the corresponding usage of appropriate rhetoric and symbols designed to communicate very differently to readers with varying spiritual, intellectual, and practical interests, with their distinctive receptivities and stages of discernment. The Qur'an repeatedly suggests to its readers, often in dramatically highlighted terms (as at Qur'an 3:7), how it is meant to be understood on different levels and how much of its language will defy the understanding of all but the most inspired readers.

What this means is that in the Qur'an, it is often precisely the "literal" Arabic reading that is overtly and quite intentionally symbolic, in ways that can often not be captured at all (at least without lengthy commentaries) in translations into English or other non-Semitic languages. This constant reiteration of the profoundly symbolic nature of the Qur'an—as indeed of every dimension of creation—means that readers of the Qur'an, whether in the Arabic or in the translated language, are repeatedly summoned to acknowledge their own existential ignorance with regard to at least some of the Qur'an's most central expressions and symbols. At the same time, however, such characteristic reminders of one's initial ignorance (or "heedlessness") are clearly meant to provoke a potentially revealing recognition of the essential spiritual mysteries evoked by so many challenging Qur'anic passages, because these repeated reminders of the Qur'an's own intrinsic interpretive ambiguity force each serious reader to search for the appropriate practical, intellectual, and spiritual keys that might help to open up those mysteries. This inherent Qur'anic problem of existential ignorance and mystery has nothing to do with being a "beginner" or somehow lacking appropriate sources of information. Instead, as has been attested by centuries of Qur'anic exegesis from the most diverse perspectives and traditions, this eventually illuminating experience of perplexity and mystery only increases in proportion to one's learning and familiarity with the Arabic Qur'an. This is a point where the faithful literalness of Arberry's translation of the Qur'an particularly well serves his English readers.[20]

Awareness and Experience

Some of the most influential traditional commentators on the Qur'an have focused on its insistence on the ongoing existential interplay between inner "knowing" (*ʿilm,* a term perhaps better translated here as "spiritual awareness") and spiritually appropriate action (*ʿamal*).[21] In other words, the central metaphysical teachings of the Qur'an are expressed in such a way that

the engaged reader can never withdraw into an abstract, purely intellectual and theoretical attitude toward the text. Instead, readers are obliged to make the essential existential connection between the symbolic teachings of the Qur'an and those dimensions of action and experience that reveal both the depths and the limitations of our awareness, as they gradually open up a deeper, uniquely individual appreciation of the realities underlying the Qur'anic symbols. This ascending spiral of realization is inseparable from the decisive role of imagination—or what we could more broadly call "spiritual intuition"—in perceiving and penetrating the meanings of the Qur'an.

This basic principle of interpretation through active participation—at once intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual—is equally applicable to any translation of the Qur'an. In practice, it means that each reader is obliged to imaginatively "perform" the Qur'an by discovering the actual experiences to which each key symbolic expression refers, just as one must imaginatively read a theatrical work or decipher a great poem.[22] Otherwise, a less active or engaged reading will tend to render the Qur'an flat and meaningless, or to turn it into a purely intellectual enterprise. The potential to appreciate and apply this principle of active participation has nothing at all to do with the particular reader's cultural or even religious background. Indeed many of the suggestions for readers of translations outlined in the next section may be easier for non-Muslim students to put into action, since their active questioning and inquiry may be less restricted by the range of pious cultural preconceptions normally surrounding any sacred text.

The Musical Unity of the Qur'an

One of the most distinctive features of the Arabic Qur'an—often only feebly suggested in translation—is its distinctive unity of meaning and expression, which is manifested in the "ideographic," semantically unifying function of its triliteral Arabic consonantal roots. Like classical Chinese characters, each of these linguistic roots expresses a rich range of broadly related meanings. These different inherent meanings, like harmonic correspondences in a musical composition, all resonate with the occurrence of each word derived from a particular root. Equally important, many of the meanings and grammatical functions that are normally expressed in English by very different words, which we immediately recognize as quite distinct "parts of speech," are instead expressed in the Qur'an by slightly differing grammatical forms of the *same* underlying Arabic root. Thus each appearance of the same verbal root, whatever its grammatical or other context may be, immediately brings to mind all of the other contexts of this same root, which together form a sort of conceptual hologram or semantic whole. At another level, the Arabic roots of the Qur'an form intimately related, "cross-referential" families of meaning, which likewise intersect and resonate in the same way. This is why Kassis's *A Concordance of the Qur'an* is such an indispensable tool

for discovering these unifying Arabic roots and semantic complexes beneath the far greater number of disparate words that must inevitably be used in any English translation.

There is simply no way that Indo-European languages can express (except in rare forms of poetry) this fundamental feature of Qur'anic language. Those of us who speak Western languages can best imagine the linguistic and semantic resonances of the Qur'an by analogy with the procedures and effects of musical composition. Hence the powerful effects of simply *listening* to the Qur'an, even without the added complexities of trying to understand its language, are already impossible to reduce to any satisfactory form of simple prosaic expression. Perhaps most important, this holographic quality of Qur'anic Arabic means that each passage is immediately related, by a rich web of associated meanings and resonances, to virtually every other passage in the text. In addition, there are a host of distinctive rhythmic, rhyming, and stylistic features that further accentuate and intensify this musical and semantic unity. One of the most striking and pervasive of these features, as in the Hebrew Bible, is the fact that each Arabic letter of the Qur'an directly corresponds to a specific number.[23] This added mathematical dimension of textual resonance allowed traditional Muslim interpreters to call forth nearly infinite possibilities of semantic correspondences that further accentuate both the interconnections and the depths of meaning that arise within the Qur'an.

The "Verbal" Universe of the Creative Divine Act

Another fundamental feature of the Arabic Qur'an, which is also invisible in English prose translations, is the active, intrinsically "verbal" nature of Qur'anic language. Each triliteral Arabic root normally reflects an underlying active verbal meaning. More particularly, in the metaphysical contexts assumed throughout the Qur'an, God is normally understood as the ultimate creative "Actor." A sense of this inherently active quality is retained in the many derived forms ("verbal nouns", participles, and so on) of those triliteral Arabic roots that are usually translated in English as more abstract concepts, such as nouns, adjectives, gerunds, adverbs, and so forth. In radical contrast to this verbal, active immediacy of the Arabic Qur'an, the underlying structure of English and other Indo-European languages reflects a stable, *object-based* world of subject-agents, their acts, and the objects of those actions, which are implicitly situated on the same extended "horizontal" plane of spatial and temporal relations. Within this linguistic and metaphysical framework, we naturally assume that it is these subjects and objects (the "nouns") that are real and thus are part of an objective spatiotemporal continuum of past, present, and future. In the language of the Qur'an, however, what is real is not these "things," but the *divine presence*—the actual, unique, immediately creative divine Act, including all of its outwardly unfolding manifestations.

This fundamental metaphysical perception, which is constantly articulated in the Qur'an as an immediate presence and reality (not as some argument or theory), means that within the Qur'an all possible voices, perspectives, and relations—that is, all the discrete entities and spatiotemporal extensions we normally take to comprise our everyday experience—are *simultaneously* expressed and perceived as a single divine Voice and Act. This omnipresent divine reality is concretely expressed in the verbal, inherently active, and instantaneous expressions that are built into the distinctive rhetoric of the Qur'an, and it is dramatically reenacted in the daily use of the Qur'an in prayer and recitation, which itself becomes a kind of individual "reascending creation."

Another aspect of this intrinsically unifying dimension of Qur'anic Arabic is the fact that Arabic verbs have (in their most common forms) only two possible "tenses": either a *present and continuing* time or a "past" form. In the Qur'an, even the grammatically "past" form commonly expresses the timeless presence of those divine creative Acts—what we call "the world" and all creation—that by their transcendent origin are always simultaneously determined, yet constantly repeated, in the divine Present and God's "ever-renewed Creation" (Qur'an 10:4, and others). Thus, nothing could more invisibly betray those decisive individual spiritual states and experiences so powerfully evoked by the pervasive eschatological passages of the Qur'an than the way that English translators typically place these intensely present metaphysical realities into a vague, indeterminate "future."[24]

While these grammatical explanations of fundamental Qur'anic structures are mystifying to readers only accustomed to English, we are all familiar with the cinema as another contemporary artistic medium that works with a similar "presential" quality that vividly expresses our inner experience of constantly shifting and coexisting perspectives and time. The standard cinematic cues and conventions for expressing internal and external shifts of time and perspective, changing instantly (and without the slightest confusion on the part of the audience) between different "points" within a single all-encompassing reality, are recognizable even to small children. The characteristically cinematic structure and sudden perspective shifts of Qur'anic language and metaphysics, though unfortunately neglected in most English translations, has been unforgettably translated into many of the creative poetic and musical masterpieces of the later Islamic humanities.

The "Three Books": The Qur'an as Logos

What is most important about the unique formal features of the Arabic Qur'an is not their linguistic or literary dimensions as such. What matters most is that each of these distinctive rhetorical elements helps the reader grasp immediately the constant Qur'anic insistence that its actual Reality is the Logos, the creative divine "Word." Among the many symbolic

expressions used by the Qur'an for this Reality are "The Book," "Wisdom," "The Mother of the Book" (*Umm al-Kitab*), and "The Criterion" (*al-Furqan*). In other words, as traditional interpreters have so frequently pointed out, the Qur'an presents itself as a spiritual mirror whose verses reflect and reveal the divine "Signs on the horizons and in their own souls" (Qur'an 41:53). The comprehensive interrelatedness between the Qur'an's verses and the Signs constituting all creation is the metaphysical counterpart of the holographic "rhetoric of allusion" referred to above, which discloses new meanings in every new circumstance and situation. As later interpreters put it, this earthly revealed book is meant to reveal the correspondence between the two cosmic "Books"—of the Spirit and of all creation—which the Spirit both mirrors and informs.

However, such grand correspondences are never presented in the Qur'an as concepts to be intellectualized or mentally "believed." This is because *iman,* or true faith, is a spiritual reality and essential connection of a different order. Instead, each reader/reciter of the Qur'an very gradually discovers its essential Reality by coming to recognize the revelatory correspondences that connect each of the Qur'an's stories, parables, "likenesses," scriptural episodes, reminders, and symbols with their existential manifestations. In the Qur'anic perspective, it is above all spiritual practice and right action (*'amal*) that opens the way to true understanding (*'ilm*). In this respect, for most beginning readers, the Qur'an can more fruitfully be compared, in its pervasive ontological focus and uniquely allusive mythic and symbolic structure, to such Asian religious classics as the Vedas, Upanishads, *I Ching,* or *Tao Te Ching,* rather than the familiar King James Bible.[25]

Interpretive Principles

Trusting One's Intuitions

The language of the Qur'an makes exquisite sense as a comprehensive and revealing "phenomenology of the Spirit"—a characterization that is illustrated, not by theological claims, but by its revelatory re-creations in the masterpieces of the Islamic humanities, whether literary, visual, or musical. However, the very uniqueness and specificity of the Qur'an's spiritual vocabulary means that the English equivalents adopted in most translations of the Qur'an simply do not make much sense in many places. This is due in part to the lack of English equivalent terms, concepts, and symbols, along with the distinctive Arabic rhetorical and grammatical dimensions alluded to above. But perhaps equally important, the opacity of translations often reflects the peculiar cultural associations surrounding English Biblical language. One quickly discovers as a teacher, for example, that most American undergraduates, whatever their family and personal religious background, cannot encounter the word "sin" without immediately associating it with a

peculiar set of historical–cultural assumptions concerning doctrines of "original sin" and related Biblical associations. However, the complex Qur'anic vocabulary that uniquely expresses the various degrees and consequences of right actions and intentions (and their contraries) refers to spiritual and psychological states that are intimately familiar to each human being, without requiring any further reference to particular cultural contexts or beliefs.

The practical upshot of this observation is very simple: wherever one finds that something in a translated version of the Qur'an does not make sense, and especially when it appears to blatantly contradict one's most basic spiritual and ethical common sense (what the Qur'an calls our universal human *fitra*), the underlying difficulty is almost certainly due to an inadequacy of translation. In most cases, such misunderstandings can be cleared up by using the Kassis's *Concordance of the Qur'an,* referring back to the underlying Arabic root of the pertinent Qur'anic term and the other contexts in which it is used (along with the English synonyms and other translator's usages also cited by Kassis for each root).

Discovering the Spiritual Virtues

One particularly important aspect of the Qur'an defying adequate translation is the spiritual virtues, especially since these virtues constitute the practical core of the Qur'an in human terms. It is revealing in this respect to note that Muslims have repeatedly adopted into their own vernacular languages many of the key Qur'anic terms for the spiritual virtues. The problem here is not just one of translation, but also of the basic fact that human beings (and the cultures they constitute) tend to reduce the unique reality and inspired spiritual realization underlying each Qur'anic virtue to more familiar social, ethical, and political norms.[26]

For example, it makes relatively little difference whether one employs English words like "patience" or "perseverance" for the Qur'anic term *sabr*. Such words alone simply cannot convey the key dimension of the suffering soul's struggle to discover the unique divine purpose that underlies its particular situation of suffering. This is an individually unique illumination that each person is forced to rediscover whenever this spiritual virtue is brought into play. So *sabr* is not about suffering or grudging patience as such, but rather about the active inner search and eventual discovery of the transformative spiritual lesson underlying each test we undergo. But translators, understandably, cannot use such lengthy paraphrases for each key technical term in their Qur'an.

The same is true for each of the spiritual virtues in the Qur'an, as well as for the culturally specific images of those Prophetic exemplars (Job, for example, in the case of *sabr*) who are subject to the familiar historical processes of routinization and misunderstanding. Here again, the Islamic humanities have often come to the rescue, precisely because of the recurrent necessity of

finding appropriate and spiritually effective means for communicating the realities expressed by such archetypal Qur'anic images and symbols.

The "Voices" of the Qur'an

Another important interpretive principle that is present throughout the Qur'an—while being normally invisible in most Western translations—is the understanding that God (or the truly ultimate Reality, *al-Haqq*) is the Speaker and Subject behind the mysterious play of constantly shifting voices (whether I, "We," the unnamed Narrator, Muhammad, or other prophets and individual actors) and audiences in the Qur'anic text. This constant and often mysterious shift of perspectives is one of the most distinctive rhetorical and structural features of the Qur'an. In the final analysis, all possible perspectives and persons are included within the One Real. In the later Islamic humanities, this interplay of shifting but ultimately Unitary perspectives and points of view is beautifully illustrated in many of the most extraordinary masterpieces of Islamic art, such as the incomparable lyrics of the Persian poet Hafez or the paintings of Behzad. So far, however, translators have not only failed to highlight this extraordinary semantic dimension of the Qur'an but have also often attempted to "polish" and gloss over these repeated, intentionally mysterious shifts among the different divine/human/Prophetic voices and perspectives.

Any translation of the Qur'an that adequately reflects such shifts in perspective and their accompanying pronoun indeterminacies (that is, who is it that is really speaking, and to whom?) confronts the English reader with what at first appear to be bizarre and even paradoxical ambiguities, unexplained jumps, and undefined subjects, audiences, and references. Certain Qur'anic verses and phrases (such as Qur'an 17:1 or 2:285–286), when translated literally, read like a kind of literary "Moebius strip," in which the initial Voice and its apparent addressee are supplanted, replaced, or even apparently reversed by the time one reaches the end of a single short passage. In such situations, the English reader must pay particularly close attention, just as when deciphering an unusually challenging poem (for example, Pound's *Cantos*), to note and then reflect upon the cinematic yet meaningful fluidity of this unique Qur'anic discourse.

Who Is Addressed by the Qur'anic Speech?

This interpretive principle has already been suggested by the points just discussed concerning the shifting voices and perspectives of the Qur'an. However, in existential and spiritual terms it is even more decisive. Although the Prophet Muhammad is often apparently the initial intended "receiver" of Qur'anic verses, a crucial mystery for all other readers of the Qur'an is their own individual relationship to the recurrent *singular* "you" that marks

God's address to the Prophet in the Qur'anic text. This constant dramatic interplay between the singular "you" directly addressed to the Prophet and the publicly plural "you" (in the sense of "you people in general"), which runs throughout the Qur'an, can be seen as a kind of Qur'anic representation of the mystery of transubstantiation.

In other words, the mystery of the singular "you" initially addressed to the Prophet is the repeated invitation to each reader/reciter/listener to rediscover—indeed quite literally to "remember" (the central Qur'anic theme of *dhikr*)—our shared human nature as Spirit. Each momentary glimpse of this reality of our being—of what it means to *be* Spirit—is itself a renewed revelation. The recurrent challenge and summons to actualize oneself in Spirit is lost in most English translations of the Qur'an, even those that attempt to more clearly distinguish these two radically different forms of "you."

Similar problems with metaphysical and spiritual implications are raised by the other distinctive voices in the Qur'an, such as the "We" that stands in dramatic contrast to the otherwise nameless Narrator, the rare divine "I" that stands for the most intimate Subject of the Qur'anic discourse, or the constant references to the unnameable Essence (*Huwa*) of the ultimately Real. From the earliest eras of Islamic history, cautious theological interpreters have attempted to gloss over such potentially troubling dilemmas, explaining the recurrent "We," for example, as the collective plural voice of all the divine names and attributes. But such facile verbal formulations are by no means universally accepted. Paradoxically, in such cases, the non-Muslim reader's encounter with a bare English translation of such central Qur'anic ambiguities may actually provoke more serious and open-ended spiritual and metaphysical reflections than are normally found in more traditional hermeneutical contexts.

Scattering, Singularity, and Repetition

Another important interpretive principle of the Qur'an involves the interplay between the scattering and the dispersal of its teachings (especially those that are metaphysical and eschatological) throughout the text, and the striking contrast between certain *repeated* injunctions and other uniquely *singular* symbols and expressions. Fortunately, these hermeneutical challenges are normally as apparent in translations as in the original Arabic. The Qur'an as a whole is marked by an elaborately detailed symbolic coherence, particularly in the details of its eschatological teachings, which integrate literally hundreds of scattered verses. This coherence is also reflected in the similar correspondences between the Qur'an's depiction of the ontological stages of manifestation of the divine Spirit and the corresponding stages of the human soul's spiritual purification and return to its Source. In general, the Suras of the Qur'an from all periods tend to cite repeatedly certain themes and images, especially with regard to practical ethical teachings that are

understandable and applicable to everyone: for example, warnings of the Judgment, reminders of the rewards for the righteous, and so on.

However, careful readers of the Qur'an will soon begin to pick out a variety of rarer, often strange, and initially puzzling images and symbols—such as the different cosmic "Trees" mentioned in the Qur'an, or the seven parallel names assigned to different Gardens and Fires—which initially might appear opaque and mystifying. To a great extent, the attempt to piece together and make sense of such scattered symbolic expressions is necessarily driven by each reader's individual sense of "cognitive dissonance." Simply put, this means that attentive readers will find it particularly revealing to focus on apparent contradictions, inconsistencies (whether ethical, metaphysical, spiritual, or simply logical), or apparent mysteries in the Qur'an. When one reads the Qur'an seriously, this task amounts to resolving an immense symbolic and metaphysical puzzle.

Many of these initially puzzling metaphysical and eschatological "contradictions" are not always resolved, but are instead simply taken for granted in later systems of Islamic thought. And in any case, prepackaged theological "resolutions" of such problematic passages are quite distinct from the far more demanding—and rewarding—spiritual tasks that arise when those Qur'anic mysteries interact with the personal challenges that are raised for each reader by his or her own spiritual situation. Such central existential issues include the recurrent Qur'anic themes of theodicy, divine Justice, undeserved suffering, and the mystery of outwardly arbitrary destinies and earthly conditions. Serious study of the Qur'an is profoundly "interactive" in just this sense, and as such, it is intrinsically a lifelong process. The effects of actively exploring and working through the Qur'anic perspectives on such unavoidable spiritual questions are radically different from simply agreeing conceptually with this or that interpretive "resolution" drawn from later hermeneutical traditions.

Qur'anic Imagery and the Hierarchy of the Senses

One revealing interpretive perspective, dramatically expressed in the distinctive imagery of the later Islamic arts and poetry, has to do with the hierarchy of the senses—that is, of their spiritual and symbolic correlates—that is so richly developed throughout the Qur'an. In this regard, even students working with translations quickly notice the memorable imagery of taste, touch, and smell that unfolds, often in precise parallelism, throughout Qur'anic descriptions of the seven eschatological "Gardens" and "Fires."

However, readers also soon discover that the deeper and more pervasive symbolic structures of the Qur'an—especially those suggesting the spiritual dimensions of the Divine— revolve around the imagery of Light and Sound or abstract spatial metaphors of "proximity" and distance from God. What is in question here is not just peculiar literary features and rhetorical unities

of the Qur'an, but rather the deeper question of the way in which different types of audiences and readers are encouraged to approach, practice, and integrate the realities of the Qur'an in ways that correspond to their own distinctive spiritual sensibilities, aptitudes, and receptivities. As always in the Qur'an, the loftiest of such symbols are also the most outwardly invisible.

The Primacy of the "Invisible"

Perhaps the most pervasive interpretive principle that one encounters in the Qur'an, even in English translation, is its constant insistence on the primacy of the "invisible" and on the corresponding depiction of the visible world as *theophany,* as an educational shadow-theater for our uniquely human task of enacting and realizing the divine names. This principle is the spiritual key to all the Islamic humanities—where the dominant later forms (music and poetry) come closest to mirroring the rhythms and translucent immateriality of the recited Qur'an itself—and to the traditional forms of *adab,* the unique spiritual expression and realization of individuality in similarly powerful but self-effacing forms of right behavior and social interaction. Nothing in the Qur'an is more obvious and omnipresent than the centrality of the spiritual world, and the actors—jinn, prophets, angels, messengers, Friends of God, and even the spiritual "birds" and other symbolic animals—that animate and direct its cosmic stage.

The Challenge of Contextualization

Readers of Arberry's translation of the Qur'an who attempt to read the Medinan Suras without any of the later tools of contextualization discussed earlier will eventually note the relative rarity of specific sociolegal "prescriptions." This observation is somewhat surprising, given the multitude of later interpretive uses made of such passages and given the widespread assumption that the Medinan sections of the Qur'an should somehow constitute a "book of laws" comparable to familiar Biblical texts. Before turning to traditional Muslim sources of contextualization and interpretation of these Medinan passages, readers should first take note of the importance of their proper contextualization and specification, both in terms of their (supposed) original historical context and of the possible wider intentions or principles underlying each situation. Behind such basic interpretive questions, of course, one also encounters the recurrent problems of authority, power, and legitimacy. This essential and far-reaching caution applies to virtually *all* of the apparently prescriptive passages from the Medinan period. One has only to think of the heated contemporary controversies surrounding the many Qur'anic passages relating to *jihad* (effort in the way of God) to recognize the perennially problematic nature of what may be at stake in such problematic Medinan contexts.

Unifying Themes

One of the most satisfying and effective approaches to appreciating the depth and unity of the Qur'an in English translation, especially for readers who are not otherwise accustomed to the metaphysical, theological, and rhetorical dimensions elaborated in the preceding sections, is to begin by noting certain unifying themes and symbols that are found in both the Meccan and the Medinan Suras. Once one has noted the recurrence of these distinctive sets of images and symbols, it is only a short step to ask the obvious follow-up question about what these recurrent themes are meant to signify.

Images of Nature

One of the most striking and obvious features of the Qur'an, even in translation, is its powerful appeal to symbolism drawn directly from the soul's experience of the natural world. The pervasive and unambiguously central role of Nature in the Qur'an—virtually neglected in many intellectualized forms of theological and philosophical interpretation—suggests a host of interpretive perspectives that are more richly developed in the later masterpieces of the Islamic humanities. In particular, readers focusing on this dimension of the Qur'an should keep in mind the sensory impact of all types of nature-imagery in the Qur'an as they were perceived in the challenging desert world of the Qur'an's original listeners. Today one can best approach these conditions and the spiritual receptivities they still engender while camping or hiking in the wilderness, or otherwise encountering relatively distant and pristine areas of the natural world. Such natural symbols, in the Qur'an as elsewhere, are most effective when they cannot be mistaken for mere abstractions.

"The Origin and the Return": The Cosmic Map

From the earliest days, students of the Qur'an have noticed that it develops an elaborate spiritual "map" or guidebook to the soul's purification and realization of its spiritual Source. The books of later Muslim interpreters approach this dimension of the Qur'an in terms of "The Origin and the Return" (*al-mabda' wa-l-ma'ad*) of the human soul. As already noted, careful study of the Qur'an reveals an elaborate symbolic ontology and cosmology, which closely parallels an even more complex symbolic account of eschatology and spiritual psychology. While readers may find deciphering this Qur'anic worldview an initially daunting task, it is nonetheless indispensable for understanding the scriptural origins and allusive depth of many of the later classics of the Islamic humanities, especially in Sufi, Shiite, and other the philosophico-theological traditions.

The Divine Names

For beginning readers, much of the Qur'an appears to be a catalogue of different divine names, which they simply tend to ignore. Yet these manifold names, reflecting their centrality in the Qur'an, became a central topic and inspiration in all subsequent traditions of Islamic theology and spirituality. Indeed, the very goal of human existence is portrayed in the Qur'an, in repeated accounts of Adam's creation and his inspired ''knowledge of the Names,'' as the gradual discovery and manifestation of the full range of attributes expressed in the divine names. This school of earthly existence, with its constant presentation of spiritual and ethical choices, culminates in the active realization of what the Qur'an terms ''the Most Beautiful Names'' (Qur'an 7:180).

In later theological terms, this unifying Qur'anic insight was expressed in the conception of the created world and the soul as theophanic manifestations of the divine attributes. From this perspective, these recurrent Qur'anic lists of particular names can be read as more than just general reminders of the aims and parameters of the school of life. They also convey more specific allusions—a sort of ongoing ''spiritual commentary,'' like the words of the chorus in Greek tragedy—to the lessons and insights highlighted in the specific Qur'anic contexts where those lists of names occur.

Light, Speech, and Writing

Two closely related families of imagery in the Qur'an have to do with the symbolism of all creation as a theophany of ''Light'' (Qur'an 24:35–40), including complex allusions to the heavenly luminaries and the alternations of ''Day'' and ''Night,'' and with the symbolism of creation as a manifestation of divine speech or writing (including the divine ''Words,'' ''Book,'' ''Pen,'' ''Tablet,'' and so on). Although these symbolic images are elaborately developed in many forms of later Islamic thought, it is often illuminating to encounter them directly in their original Qur'anic contexts, where their metaphysical dimensions are not always immediately apparent. In particular, it is important to note that in these Qur'anic contexts the imagery of ''Night,'' far from being negative or opposed to the Light, typically refers directly to the divine depths of the invisible spiritual dimensions of creation and cosmogony.

Stories, Parables, and Allusions

Traditional interpreters of the Qur'an have often tended to separate out such different literary forms in the Qur'an as ''stories'' (including the Sura of Joseph, described as ''the most beautiful of stories'' [Qur'an 12:3]), allusions to earlier sacred figures and events, or parables and ''symbols'' (*amthal*). Each of these Qur'anic motifs has inspired significant examples of

spiritual writing and teaching in later Islamic tradition. It is particularly revealing, given the frequent parallels that are drawn with Biblical and other spiritual literatures, to examine more closely each of the explicitly divine parables detailed in the Qur'an, together with the Qur'an's own interpretive comments. These comments pointedly emphasize the contrast between such divine, spiritually valid parables and the unconscious—and ultimately illusory—"likenesses" made up by human beings. Such passages are a particularly illuminating example of the ways the Qur'an itself suggests useful ways to interpret and more fully understand its teachings.

Spiritual Virtues and Prophetic Exemplars

One of the central interpretive challenges in the Qur'an, as in the Bible, is to discover the essential connections between the spiritual virtues and their dramatization in the stories presented in the scriptures. Such stories often allude to various spiritual exemplars and intermediaries, such as the prophets of earlier eras. However, these Qur'anic allusions also extend to both exemplary and "hypocritical" Muslims (and outright enemies) from Muhammad's own surroundings, as well as other legendary figures from indigenous Arabic and Biblical traditions.[27] These exemplars and the virtues they represent are subjects that are richly amplified in later Hadith accounts, *Sira* literature (involving the life of the Prophet, his Companions, and the history of the early Muslim community), and "tales of the prophets" (*Qisas al-Anbiya'*), which often include apocryphal materials from before the advent of Islam. Here it is useful for students to begin with the typically very brief Qur'anic accounts themselves, without relying on interpretive materials from external sources, since reliance on later forms of ready-made interpretation tends to foreclose the demands of actively imaginative interpretation that are otherwise demanded by the unadorned English translation.

CONCLUSION: THE QUR'AN AS MIRROR AND PRISM

O Beloved, through Love we are conjoined with You:
Wherever You put Your foot, we're the ground for You!
In this school/path of Loving, how can it be
That we see the world through You— and yet, we don't see You?

(Quatrain of Jalal al-Din Rumi)[28]

One of the key teachings of the Qur'an, indeed of the Islamic tradition more generally, is the primacy of intention. All the pointers and observations mentioned above may help to reveal unsuspected dimensions of the Qur'an, or to remove certain obstacles that stand in the way of more fully appreciating the Qur'an in translation. However, these suggestions

are no substitute for the intention and receptivity that each reader alone can provide. Some of the greatest spiritual teachers in Islam have summed up their advice for anyone encountering the Qur'an in a single phrase: "You should seek to understand each verse as though it were being revealed directly to you."

As others have even more simply put it, the Qur'an is a mirror for the soul. We discover in it what we bring to it, in proportion to the effort we actually devote to penetrating its mysteries. We hear its revelations to the degree that we truly listen. Yet as the Qur'an so often reminds us, the true mirror through which we perceive the Qur'an—and all the divine "signs" —is the illumined Heart, which is itself (in the words of a famous hadith) "the Throne of the All-Merciful." For the Qur'an is like a prism, a refracting lens, that is set between the divine creative Light and its endless momentary reflections in every shifting facet of creation.

The ordinary vision of the human being, as Rumi's poem reminds us, remains entranced and beguiled by this world's shimmering shadow play of veils and colors. The Qur'an, which more than 20 times pointedly describes itself as "*the* Reminder," offers a potent response to the dilemma highlighted by the great Sufi poet. Through the revealing lens of the Qur'an, we can gradually come to discern the One luminous, invisible Source of those endlessly shifting reflections, first discovering—and then mirroring back in our own illumined responses—those "Most-beautiful Names" that are so uniquely manifested in each theophanic event. We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in their own souls, until it shines forth to them that He is the truly Real (Qur'an 41:53).

NOTES

1. See the detailed discussion of these problems, particularly in connection to the recurrent misunderstandings arising from English translators' common use of familiar "Biblical" terms, in James Winston Morris, "Qur'an Translation and the Challenge of Communication: Toward a 'Literal' (Study) Version of the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies,* 2 (February 2000): 53–68. This article, which will be included in my forthcoming book *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities,* forms a helpful supplement to the cautions outlined below.

2. However, the unique language of the Arabic Qur'an is also different from the common dialects of spoken Arabic as well. Indeed, some of its unusual words and expressions were apparently mysterious even for its original audiences.

3. Some helpful current Web sites, most including a range of translations and translated shorter commentaries as well as audio and video material, include http://www.quranonline.net, http://www.reciter.org, http://www.altafsir.com, and http://www.islamicity.com.

4. In this chapter we will follow the standard abridged scholarly citation system of giving first the number of the Sura, then the number of the verse or *aya*: thus (1:3) =

Surat al-Fatiha, verse 3. Muslim sources usually give instead the standard Arabic names traditionally associated with the Suras.

5. The *Basmalla* refers to the Arabic phrase, ''In the Name of God the All-Loving, the All-Compassionate'' (*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*), that opens virtually all of the Suras of the Qur'an.

6. See Morris, ''Remembrance and Repetition: The Spiritual Foundations of Islamic Aesthetics,''*Sufi Magazine,* 47 (2000).

7. For centuries, a similarly wide-ranging cultural role was played by the teaching of Latin prayers and rituals in Catholic schools, coupled with the wider use of Latin at higher levels of education, across many cultural and linguistic divides. Until recent times, the learned written forms of many of the vernacular Islamic languages (Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, and so on) likewise presupposed significant knowledge of the classical Arabic of the Qur'an.

8. Partly because of the traditional reverence for the calligraphed Qur'anic text, as well as related technical challenges involving Arabic calligraphy, printed or lithographed books only became widely available in most regions of the Islamic world during the nineteenth century, and in some areas even more recently.

9. See Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), and William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

10. Of course much the same could be said of the fully literate scriptural specialists and authorities in most religious traditions, prior to the radically new historical developments connected with the Reformation, mass literacy, and the spread of printing and affordable vernacular books, including Bible translations. Those revolutionary developments only superficially touched much of the Islamic world until very recently. The contemporary popularization in many Muslim countries of the Internet and mass digital media is already bringing about dramatic unforeseen transformations in the traditional structures of religious education and interpretive authority.

11. See the outlines of this process in Morris, ''Situating Islamic 'Mysticism': Between Written Traditions and Popular Spirituality,'' In *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. R. Herrera (New York and Berlin: Peter Lang, 1993), 293–334. A wider discussion of this issue is also included in the forthcoming *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities.*

12. Two of the most comprehensive introductions to the study of the Qur'an in translation, which are accessible for university-level students, are Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: IB Tauris, 1999).

13. Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999) provides a particularly effective and accessible example of what can be accomplished in this regard. The volume includes annotated and carefully crafted translations of many of the shorter Meccan Suras, as well as a useful CD of examples of Qur'anic recitation.

14. Perhaps the most helpful Qur'an translation of this type (providing very extensive notes dealing with related historical contexts, Hadith, and other traditional contextual material) is that of Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (London:

The Book Foundation, 2003). The recently established *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* also provides an important venue for keeping track of the many new translations and scholarly publications in this field.

15. Hanna Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'an* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Under each Arabic root, Kassis also mentions the different English equivalents used by several other popular English Qur'an translations, in addition to Arberry.

16. *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001–2005).

17. Camille Helminski's *The Light of Dawn: Daily Readings From the Holy Qur'an* (Boston: Shambhala Books, 1998) provides a beautiful, poetically rendered illustration of the usefulness of this particular approach, which more closely reflects the actual contemplative use of the Qur'an in Islamic prayer and spiritual life.

18. The most accessible introduction to the life of the Prophet and the early Muslim community is Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: Inner Traditions, 1987). This work is particularly helpful in suggesting the relevant images of the Prophet in later Islamic traditions of piety and spirituality. Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an* (see n. 12 above) provides an extensive bibliography of the wider scholarly literature on the Prophet's life, along with a balanced discussion of more recent historical and philological approaches. A wide spectrum of traditional Muslim commentary literature (*tafsir*) is summarized for Suras 1–3 in Mahmoud Ayyoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, in 2 Vols. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1984 and 1992).

19. Books written in Arabic (and other Islamic languages using the Arabic alphabet) normally begin from the right-hand side of the opened book, which English readers naturally assume to be the book's end.

20. See the experimental development of a variety of intentionally literal and visually revealing translation devices in James W. Morris, "Dramatizing the Sura of Joseph: An Introduction to the Islamic Humanities," Annemarie Schimmel Festschrift issue of *Journal of Turkish Studies* 18 (1994): 201–224. An expanded version of this translation and commentary will be included in the forthcoming *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities.*

21. See the translation by M. Abul Quasem of al-Ghazali's still remarkably useful *Jawahir al-Qur'an,* which is built around this distinction, in *The Jewels of the Qur'an: Al-Ghazali's Theory* (London: Kegan Paul, 1983).

22. See the introduction to our study, "Dramatising the Sura of Joseph," cited in n. 20 above.

23. Our "Arabic" decimal number system originally came to the Arab world from India, and its figures are designated in Arabic as "Indian" numbers. Over the course of Islamic history, the complex system of Arabic letters and their numerical equivalents gave rise to the esoteric discipline of the "science of letters" (*'ilm al-huruf*), rooted in the sacred Qur'anic alphabet.

24. Qur'anic Arabic uses a very specific, highly visible particle (*sawfa* or *sa-*) to indicate those cases where a verb refers specifically to a future event or contingency. Such definitely future verb forms (as in 102:3–4) are almost never highlighted as such in English translations.

25. For an excellent and wide-ranging introduction (with very helpful bibliography) to the historically complex questions surrounding ''Biblical'' figures and stories in the Qur'an, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur'an: An Introduction to the Qur'an and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002). Wheeler Thackston's translation of al-Kisa'i's *Tales of the Prophets* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1997) provides a representative illustration of the types of popular stories and legends that often inform traditional Muslim interpretations of the Qur'an.

26. Toshihiko Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966) still remains the best introduction to the problem of the spiritual virtues in the Qur'an, focusing on the complex Qur'anic (and early Islamic) transformation of earlier Arab ethical norms and values. See also our chapter, ''The Mysteries of *Ihsan*: Natural Contemplation and the Spiritual Virtues in the Qur'an,'' in the forthcoming *Openings*.

27. See n. 25 above for references to the prophetic stories in question.

28. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Kulliyat Shams-i Tabriz*, ed. B. Furuzanfar (Tehran, 1341/1922-3), p. 64 (no. 11 of the *Ruba'iyyat*).

7

Moses and the Saint

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

A story goes that
Moses, peace be upon him, went
    to find a saint in the desert
        said to be one of the
greatest masters alive.

He went into the arid wastes,
made a camp, went further, made
    another camp, went further perhaps than
anyone dared go, being Moses, and

found, out where the world ends, in a
blazing nothingness of sand and
sky, lying face down with his
chin on the
ground, his saint,
saying with each breath, in a
barely audible voice, only:

Allah—Allah—Allah

The sound of his tongue and the
heartbeat of his body boomed all the
dunes around him to ring in
harmony with that Name.

Moses was struck dumb.

Here, without food, without water,
lay the Master of the Age, dry as
bone, nearly naked, more like
the sand itself than
a man.

He sat respectfully, the
saint not seeing him, but keeping his
invocation throbbing on dry lips with
a dry tongue:

Allah—Allah—Allah

At last the saint opened his eyes and saw
Moses, who bowed, and, as good
servant to master, asked if there was
anything the saint needed.

The saint said, in a small voice
Moses had to bend close to hear:
"Yes. If you could only bring me
a blanket against the
cold nights, I would be
grateful."

Moses got up
and set out across the
dunes again to his
last camp, grabbed his
blanket and
brought it to the man, who was now

dead.

Shocked, Moses sat in
wonder at the sight. Then he got
up and went
off across the desert to his
camp again to bring a
shovel to bury him.

When he arrived, the body was already
dust.

Only
bones remained.

Amazed, Moses set
off again into the
glare to get a
receptacle for the
bones, to bring them back to
bury them in the town of the
saint's birth.

When he arrived back at the place where
the saint had died, Moses found
only a swirling whirlpool of dust where the
bones had been, and
nothing left but
spiraling drifts of white powder

twisting in the wind.

Moses sat down, his
eyes on the ground.

Then he put his
face on the ground in the
ache and questioning of his
heart, and asked:
O Allah! What is the
meaning of this.? Your
saint gone like a
breath in the desert wind?

And God's voice in the
heart of Moses replied:

So long as My friend needed nothing but Me
I gave him all he required.

As soon as he needed something from
other than Me, I

took him.

4 Ramadan

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *The Ramadan Sonnets* (San Francisco and Bethesda, Maryland: Jusoor/City Lights Books, 1996). Reprinted from Jusoor/City Lights Books and republished in the Ecstatic Exchange Series. This poem is reproduced here by permission of the author.

8

Prophets and Messengers of God

Joseph Lumbard

THE SIGNS OF GOD

In the Qur'an, all of creation is presented as a sign (*aya*) of God. Nothing exists but that it is a means whereby the divine reveals a part of its glory. A bird, a tree, the stars, and the change from night to day—God is directly present in each of these. In this way, every part of creation, no matter how big or small, is like a word or a letter in an ongoing revelation. The Qur'an continuously recalls the wonders of creation as a means of reminding the reader or listener of God:

> Truly in the heavens and the earth are signs for the believers. And in your creation and in that which He spreads [over the earth] from among the beasts are signs for a people who are pious. And [in] the alteration of the night and day, and the nourishment that God sends down from the sky, then by which He revives the earth after its death, and [in] the dispensation of the winds are signs for people who discern. These are the signs of God. We recite them to you with truth. So in what account after God and His signs will they believe?
>
> (Qur'an 45:3–6)[1]

Reminders like this permeate the Qur'an such that the signs of the first revelation, the revelation of God's creation, are made to speak through the verses of the Qur'an, the final revelation. *Aya,* the word used for a sign from God, is the same word as that used for a verse in God's revealed books. Just as with the revelations made known to the Prophets in the form of books—the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels, and others—every aspect of creation is conveyed through God's angels.[2] In this way, all that is around us is seen as a message and is sustained through Messengers. The great Messengers of religious history—the Prophets of God—have not been sent with anything new but with a renewal of the first message, so that human beings may reflect

and return to a proper understanding of God, the cosmos, and their relation to both.

PROPHECY

The means by which the Prophets bring this message is revelation (*wahy*). Revelation is not seen as a product of reason or reflection, or as mere inspiration. Muslims maintain that revelation is cast directly into the heart of God's Prophets through the Angel Gabriel, the Faithful Spirit (*al-Ruh al-Amin*): "Truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the Worlds that the Faithful Spirit has brought down upon your heart [Muhammad]" (Qur'an 26:192–194). The message of revelation is true and beyond doubt: "Truly it is naught but a revelation revealed, taught by the One of Intense Power.... He revealed unto His servant what He revealed. The heart lied not of what it saw" (Qur'an 53:4–5, 10–11). The reception of an unerring message is not particular to the Prophet Muhammad. All Prophets are preserved from erring in the reception and deliverance of the messages revealed to them by God (Qur'an 72:26–28). One of the signs of God's infinite mercy is that there is no time in history when humankind has not had access to truth through revelation.

When human beings forget and alter the content of a previous revelation, it is time to send a new Prophet to remind them of God's message. However, the message of a new Prophet is not different in its essential content from what came before. Muslims maintain that the Qur'an has been protected from alteration. As God says in the Qur'an: "Truly, We have revealed the Remembrance [i.e., the Qur'an] and are its preservers" (Qur'an 15:9); "Falsehood does not approach it from before or after" (Qur'an 41:42). This is not taken to mean that human beings will not err in their interpretation of the message, but only that access to the true meaning of revelation will remain until the end of time. Muslims thus acknowledge and revere a panorama of Prophets to whom God has sent a message of truth. This cycle of prophecy began with Adam and ended with Muhammad, who is the "Seal of Prophets" (*Khatam al-Nabiyyin*) (Qur'an 33:40) and who said in his famous farewell address, "O people, no Prophet or Messenger will come after me and no new faith will be born after me."[3]

The station of prophecy is not attained through human aspiration. It is bestowed by God before the beginning of time. This pretemporal origination of prophecy is referred to by the Prophet Muhammad in a famous saying: "I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay."[4] The Prophets are sent at different points in human history to reestablish the relationship between the Divine and the human. According to the Qur'an, God's Messengers have been sent to all human communities: "We have sent to every people a Messenger, that they may worship God" (Qur'an 16:32); "For

every people there is a Messenger'' (Qur'an 10:48). Each Messenger is sent to teach Divine Oneness (*tawhid*) and submission to God (*Islam*): ''We never sent a Messenger before you save that We revealed to him, saying, 'There is no god but I, so worship Me''' (Qur'an 21:25). God specifically says to Moses: ''I am God! There is no god but Me. So worship Me'' (Qur'an 20:14). The Prophets Noah, Hud, Salih, and Shu'ayb (Jethro) are presented as saying to their communities: ''O my people! Worship God! You have no other god but Him'' (Qur'an 7:59; 7:65; 7:73; 7:85). For this reason Muslims are commanded to believe not only in the Prophet Muhammad but in all of God's Prophets as well:

> Say: We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which is revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Patriarchs, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We do not distinguish between any of them, and we are unto him submitters.
>
> (Qur'an 2:136; 3:84)

SUBMISSION (*ISLAM*) AND PROPHECY

Every revelation to every Prophet of God is seen as a form of *Islam* or submission to God. The Qur'an thus presents previous Prophets and their followers as Muslims—those who submit to God. The first Prophet to refer to himself as a submitter is Noah, who said to his people, ''My recompense is but with God, and I was commanded to be among those who submit to God (*muslimin*)'' (Qur'an 10:72). The Qur'an says of Abraham: ''Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian, rather he was a true devotee (*hanif*),[5] a submitter to God (*muslim*)'' (Qur'an 3:67). According to the Qur'an, ''[Abraham's] Lord said to him, 'Submit!' He said, 'I submit to the Lord of the Worlds''' (Qur'an 2:131). After Abraham and Ishmael erected the Ka'ba, they prayed, ''Our Lord, make us submitters unto You, and make our offspring a nation submitting unto You. Show us our rites and turn, relenting, unto us'' (Qur'an 2:128). From this prayer began the spread of ''submission'' among all the Children of Abraham: ''And Abraham counseled his sons, as did Jacob, 'O my sons, God has chosen the religion (*din*) for you, so do not die but as submitters to God'' (Qur'an 2:132). In obedience to the wish of Jacob, the Prophet Joseph said to God, ''Let me die as a submitter and bind me to the righteous'' (Qur'an 12:101). Indeed, all of Jacob's sons promised their father to worship God and to be submitters to His will:

> Were you witnesses when death came upon Jacob, when he said to his sons, ''What will you worship after me?'' They said, ''We worship your God, the

> God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, a single God, and we are submitters unto Him."
>
> (Qur'an 2:133)

These passages demonstrate how former Prophets are presented in the Qur'an as Muslims, submitters to God. Although they are less numerous, there are other passages that refer to the followers of the Prophets as submitters as well. The first of these in order of revelation refers to Moses, who tells his followers, "O my people, if you believe in God then trust [in Him] if you are submitters" (Qur'an 10:84). Pharaoh's magicians believe in Moses after witnessing his miracles and respond to Pharaoh's threats, saying, "You only take vengeance on us because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, pour patience upon us and let us die as submitters" (Qur'an 7:126).

The next account in order of revelation is the story of Bilqis, Queen of Sheba, who was called with her people to follow Solomon. First, Solomon sent a bird with his message, saying: "O you people, a Noble Book has been presented to me. It is from Solomon, in the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate, that you not resist [God] and come to [God] as submitters" (Qur'an 27:29–31). Solomon then confirms that he and his people are submitters to God, saying, "We were given knowledge before this and we were submitters" (Qur'an 27:42). After meeting Solomon, Bilqis agrees to follow his religion, saying, "My Lord, truly I have wronged myself. I have submitted with Solomon to God, the Lord of the Worlds" (Qur'an 27:44). This story gives a fresh account of one of the many Hebrew Prophets who are mentioned in both the Bible and the Qur'an. In other passages, the Apostles of Jesus also refer to themselves as submitters, saying to Jesus, "We are helpers of God! We believe! Bear witness that we are submitters" (Qur'an 3:52). This is confirmed in the following verse, where God states: "Then I revealed to the Apostles to believe in Me and My Messenger [Jesus]. They responded, 'We believe and bear witness that we are submitters'" (Qur'an 5:111).

Through passages such as these, the whole of religious history is presented as different modes of Islam—as different ways in which human beings have submitted to God. Thus, the Qur'an says of Jews and Christians: "When [the Qur'an] is recited to them, they say, 'We believe in it. Truly, it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed, before it [was revealed] we were submitters" (Qur'an 28:53). The forms of submission to God—the rites, rituals, and laws incumbent upon God's message—may differ, but the Message of submission and divine oneness never changes: "We never sent a Messenger before thee save that We revealed to him, saying, 'There is no god but Me, so worship Me'" (Qur'an 21:25).

According to Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, "Each of the religious dispensations brought by the Prophets was the most complete form of religion for

the time and the people concerned."[6] Because of this difference in religious forms, some Prophets are favored over others, although all Prophets are equally revered as Messengers of God:

> And those Messengers— some We have favored above others. Among them was [Moses] to whom God spoke, and [God] raised some in degrees. We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear explications, and We confirmed him with the Holy Spirit.
>
> (Qur'an 2:253)

Yet God also says, "We do not differentiate between any of His Messengers" (Qur'an 2:285) and commands Muslims to have faith in all of them. Therefore, the degree to which one religion can be seen as superior to another depends not on the Messenger or Prophet through whom it was revealed but rather on the degree to which its adherents remain true to the teachings of God and the Messenger or Prophet through whom God revealed them.

The words Messenger (*rasul*) and Prophet (*nabi*) are often used interchangeably, but they have specific meanings in an Islamic context. According to some scholars, Messengers differ from Prophets in that Messengers bring an entirely new religion, a new *din,* whereas the Prophets reaffirm a previously revealed religion and reestablish its proper observance. A Messenger is also enjoined by God to call people to follow His message, whereas this is not incumbent upon all Prophets. A Messenger thus fulfills all of the functions of a Prophet, but a Prophet does not perform the same functions as a Messenger. The Prophets are far more numerous than Messengers, totaling 124,000 according to one tradition. Among the Messengers, Muslim scholars identify an elite group known as *Uluw al-Azm,* "Those who Possess Steadfastness" (Qur'an 46:35). This term refers to five key Prophets of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

All Prophets and Messengers teach divine oneness (*tawhid*) and submission (*Islam*), such that all people can follow them and implement their teachings. However, the Prophets and the Messengers are also believed to possess qualities that cannot be imitated. The most evident of these are the miracles (*mu'jizat*) they perform. Well-known examples of Prophetic miracles include Jesus' ability to raise the dead and the miracles of Moses to which both the Torah and the Qur'an attest. These include the staff that turned into a serpent (Qur'an 7:117; 27:10; 28:31, *et passim*), the hand that turned white (Qur'an 7:108; 20:22; *et passim*), the parting of the Red Sea (26:63), and Moses's bringing forth water by striking a boulder with his staff (Qur'an 2:60; 7:160).

The Messengers and the Prophets are also inimitable in their inerrancy and impeccability (*'isma*), meaning that they cannot make errors in

conveying the revelation that is entrusted to them and that they cannot be disobedient toward God. The following passage is generally understood as alluding to the all-encompassing protection under which God places His Prophets:

> [He is] Knower of the Unseen; He reveals His secret unto no one, save whom He pleases as a Messenger. Then He makes a guard to go before and behind [His Messengers], that He may know if they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord. He surrounds all their actions, and He takes account of all things.
>
> (Qur'an 72:26–28)

Inerrancy is believed to be essential for the Prophets so that they can be fully trusted by their followers and that the ultimate purpose of prophecy, divine guidance, can be realized. As such, God says regarding the Prophets: "We chose them and guided them unto a straight path" (Qur'an 6:87). Muslims also believe that God's protection of the Prophets from sin and error must remain with a Prophet his entire life, even before the Prophetic mission begins. For if one were to have led a life without probity and then claim to be a Prophet, his former acts would cause many to doubt the veracity of the message.

Although the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Prophets are the majority of those mentioned in the Qur'an, prophecy is not necessarily limited to the Abrahamic tradition alone. As the Qur'an says:

> Truly, We have revealed to you [Muhammad] as We revealed to Noah and the Prophets after him. And We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and the Patriarchs, and Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and We gave David the Psalms; and Messengers of whom We have told you and Messengers of whom We have not told you.
>
> (Qur'an 4:163–164)

Only 24 Prophets are mentioned by name in the Qur'an, but a *hadith*, or saying of the Prophet Muhammad, tells us that there have been either 313 or 315 Messengers throughout human history. Thus, there are far more Messengers than those who are mentioned in the Qur'an. Though most Muslim scholars maintain a narrow and exclusivist view of revelation, others have read this Hadith account as a possible reference to the Messengers of non-Abrahamic traditions, such as Buddha. The vast majority of Islamic scholars maintain that only men can be Prophets, and for this they cite the following verse of the Qur'an: "We sent no one before you but men to whom We revealed [Our message], so ask the people of remembrance if you know not" (Qur'an 21:7). A small minority of scholars,

mostly in Islamic Spain, maintained that this verse should not be read as a limitation and that the Virgin Mary and Eve before her were both Prophets as well.

THE UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF PROPHECY

Because human collectivities speak different languages and face different trials, Messengers of God and their corresponding messages differ in language and in the laws they ordain. Regarding the issue of language the Qur'an says: ''We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people'' (Qur'an 14:4). Regarding the difference in revealed laws, the Qur'an states:

> For each [people] We have made a law and a way (*minhaj*). If God willed, He would have made you a single people, but [He made you as you are] in order to try you regarding what has come to you. So compete in good deeds. To God is your return, all of you. Then He will inform you of that wherein you differed.
>
> (Qur'an 5:48)

There are thus different ways of understanding God and the relationship with God for different human collectivities. God has sent many laws through various Messengers. To each law corresponds a particular way—a spiritual path—and this path entails the performance of particular rites. Other passages of the Qur'an confirm that God has revealed not only different laws but also different ways of worship:

> For every people (*umma*) We have made a rite that they practice with devotion. So let them not contend with you in this matter. And call unto your Lord; truly you follow straight guidance. If they dispute with you then say, ''God knows best what you do. God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection regarding that wherein you differed.''
>
> (Qur'an 22:67–69)

Every religion entails prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, among other obligations, although the exact forms differ. One of the reasons for such differences in creed and practice is revealed in the following verse:

> O Mankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and have made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another; surely the most honorable of you with God is the most pious; surely God is Knowing, Aware.
>
> (Qur'an 49:13)

Despite the different forms of human communities and beliefs, the fundamental core of each message is the same. Thus, Jesus reports in the Qur'an that he was sent "to confirm the truth of the Torah that was before me, and to make lawful to you certain things that were forbidden to you before" (Qur'an 3:50). So too, the Qur'an proclaims the validity of all the Prophets and scriptures that have preceded it: "What We have revealed to you [Muhammad] from the Book is the Truth, confirming what was before you" (Qur'an 35:31). Another verse states: "[God] has sent down upon you [Muhammad] the Book with the Truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime as guidance to the people" (Qur'an 3:3). The Qur'an thus portrays an underlying continuity between all revelations and hence all Messengers and Prophets. As God says to the Prophet Muhammad, "Nothing has been said to you save what was said to the Messengers before you" (Qur'an 10:48). Regarding the Qur'an, God states: "Truly it is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds in a clear Arabic tongue, brought down by the Faithful Spirit (Gabriel) upon your heart that you may be among the warners. Truly, it is in the scriptures (*zubur*) of the ancients" (Qur'an 26:192–196).[7] And in another verse: "Truly, this [message] is in the pages (*suhuf*) of the ancients, the pages of Abraham and Moses" (Qur'an 87:18–19). Reaffirming the continuous line of Prophecy, the Prophet Muhammad said, "The Prophets are half-brothers; their mothers differ but their religion (*din*) is one."[8] In this chapter, I can only touch upon the most prominent figures in this noble lineage.

ADAM: THE FIRST MESSENGER

In the Qur'an, the first of these "half-brothers" is Adam. Whereas the Christian tradition sees Adam as a fallen being in need of salvation through Jesus, in the Qur'an he is presented as the first of all Prophets and the first with whom God made a covenant: "We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot; We did not find in him any determination" (Qur'an 20:115). In Islam, the cyclical drama of receiving, forgetting, breaking, and renewing the covenant with God, which is a central theme of the Hebrew Scriptures, begins not with Abraham but with Adam, the first of all human beings. As such, the Qur'an gives a different version of Adam's fall than does the Bible. In the Qur'an, Adam is not tempted by Eve. Satan tempts both Adam and Eve, and both are responsible for their fall from the Garden. Because of their transgression, all of humankind was banished: "God expelled them from that in which they were. We said, 'Descend all of you, as foes to one another'" (Qur'an 2:36). This "descent" from the Garden as "foes to one another" represents the consequences of forgetting and breaking God's covenant. In the Qur'an, after the fall, Adam and Eve repent for their sins: "They said, 'Our Lord, We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and do

not have mercy upon us, we will be among those who are lost'" (Qur'an 7:23). Then God relents unto Adam and reveals His guidance:

> Then Adam received words [of revelation] from his Lord, so He relented to him; Truly, He is the Oft-Relenting, the Merciful. We said, "Descend from [the Garden] all of you, and when a guidance comes to you from Me, then for whomever follows My guidance there is no fear, nor shall they grieve."
>
> (Qur'an 2:37–38)

From one perspective, the words received by Adam from God mark the beginning of the cycle of revelation. Before falling from grace, Adam and Eve were in no need of words to remind them of the oneness of God and submission to His will. However, now that they have forgotten these truths, human beings must receive periodic reminders to bring them back to their realization. They are in need of Messengers and Prophets to remind them of the Truth.

ABRAHAM: A FATHER OF MONOTHEISM

The name Abraham is mentioned as frequently in the Qur'an as in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Many verses are dedicated to the story of Abraham and his struggle against polytheism. These verses repeat some of the accounts from the Bible. However, as with all of the Prophets, the Qur'an provides additional information and new perspectives that are not available in the Bible.[9] These do not contradict the Biblical accounts; rather, they complement them.

One of the most important additions to the Biblical story of Abraham concerns his first turn to monotheism and his denunciation of his father and tribe. In the Bible, Abraham's father is named Terah (Genesis 11:24–32), but in the Qur'an, he is called Azar. The story begins with Abraham's opposition to his father's idol worshipping: "Abraham said to his father Azar, 'Do you take idols for gods? Truly I see you and your people in manifest error'" (Qur'an 6:74). The Bible recognizes the polytheism of Abraham's father in the book of Joshua but says little about it. In the Qur'an, however, the conflict between Abraham and the polytheism of his people is of central importance. It is presented as a foreshadowing of the conflict that the Prophet Muhammad would later experience with the idol worshippers of pre-Islamic Arabia. The Qur'an provides a direct reference to the situation in Mecca during the life of the Prophet by switching seamlessly from the story of Abraham and his tribe to that of Muhammad and the Arabs:

> When Abraham said to his father and his people, "Surely I am innocent of what you worship, save Him who originated me, for truly He will guide me." He made

> it an enduring word among his posterity, so that they would return [to God]. Nay, but I gave these and their fathers enjoyment until the Truth and a clear Messenger came to them. And when the Truth came to them, they said, "This is sorcery; truly we do not believe in it." They say, "Why was this Qur'an not made to descend upon a great man from one of the two cities [Mecca and Ta'if]?
>
> (Qur'an 43:26–33)

Positioned between the two accounts, it is not clear whether the sentence beginning with, "Nay, but I gave these and their fathers enjoyment" applies to Abraham's people or to Muhammad's people, or to both. Indeed, Muhammad's rebuke of his people is portrayed in the same way as Abraham's rebuke of his father:

> O my father, why do you worship that which cannot hear or see, and avails you not? O my father, Truly there has come to me knowledge which has not come unto you. So follow me, and I will lead you on a right path.
>
> (Qur'an 19:41–43)

Like the idol worshippers of Mecca, Abraham's father and his people were obstinate and unyielding. For they too were more devoted to the ways of their ancestors than to the ways of God. The conflict between these opposing ways is illustrated in the following passage:

> Truly, We gave Abraham his guidance beforehand, and We were knowledgeable of him, when he said to his father and his people, "What are these images to which you pay devotion?" They said, "We found our fathers worshipping them." He replied, "Truly you and your fathers were in manifest error!" They said, "Have you come to us with the truth, or are you among those who jest?" He replied, "No, rather your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, who created [these images]; and I am among those who testify to that."
>
> (Qur'an 21:51–56)

Having thus challenged his people, Abraham then smashes all of their idols except the largest. When asked what had happened, he responds that the largest idol had destroyed the others and invited his people to question the idols regarding this. They respond, "You know well that they do not speak" (Qur'an 21:65). To which Abraham replies, "So instead of God do you worship what can neither benefit nor harm you? Fie, upon you and all that you worship instead of God! Do you not understand?" (Qur'an 21:66–67)

For many Muslims Abraham represents the archetype of the sincere monotheist, who will stop at nothing to eradicate the iniquities that surround him. They thus hearken to Abraham as a father of pure monotheism and see the Qur'an and the *Sunna,* or custom, of the Prophet Muhammad as a renewal

of Abraham's mission. Several verses of the Qur'an imply that for his sincere belief and indefatigable opposition to polytheism, Abraham was rewarded with offspring who would maintain the line of prophecy: "And when he had withdrawn from them and what they worshipped instead of God, We granted him Isaac and Jacob and each of them we made a Prophet" (Qur'an 19:49). The line of Prophets that have come forth from Abraham's loins is thus seen as a means by which God keeps His covenant by continuing to guide all of humankind. Whereas Judaism only recognizes the line of Prophets who emerged from Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob, Islam maintains that Abraham's eldest son Ishmael was also party to the covenant and that the legacy of prophecy would be continued in his progeny as well. Indeed, it is from the line of Ishmael that the Prophet Muhammad descended.

ISHMAEL AND ISAAC

Ishmael is seldom mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures and is never mentioned in the New Testament. From this perspective, the Qur'an can be seen as the great restorer of Ishmael to his place in salvation history, for it claims that he too was party to all that was promised to the family of Abraham in the Torah.[10] Thus, the Qur'an repeatedly mentions both Isaac and Ishmael among the Prophets of God (Qur'an 2:136; 3:84; 4:163).[11]

Like the Hebrew Scriptures, the Qur'an provides extensive accounts of the descendants of Isaac, from Jacob to Jesus. However, the Qur'an focuses more upon the life of Ishmael and his relationship with Abraham than upon the life of Isaac. Even the famous sacrifice of Isaac is retold in a manner that makes it appear that the elder son Ishmael may have been the subject of the sacrifice instead of his brother. Some scholars, however, argue that the Qur'anic account supports the Biblical account in which Isaac is the one who was to be sacrificed:[12]

> Abraham said, "As for me I am going to my Lord who will guide me. My Lord, grant to me [progeny] among the righteous." Therefore, We informed him of a noble son. When he reached the age of maturity, Abraham said, "O my son, I see in my dream that I am to sacrifice you. So what is your opinion?" He said, "O my father, do what you are commanded! You will find me— God willing— one of the forbearing. When both had submitted and [Abraham] laid [his son] down upon his forehead, We called to him, "O Abraham, you have verified the vision." Thusly do We reward those who do what is beautiful. Truly, this is the clear trial. So We redeemed him with a great sacrifice, and left it for future generations. May peace be upon Abraham. Likewise do We recompense those who do what is beautiful. Truly, he is among Our righteous servants. Then We informed him of Isaac, a Prophet from among the righteous, and We blessed him and Isaac.
>
> (Qur'an 37:100–112)

In accordance with Abraham's act of complete submission, Muslims continue to celebrate this event every year at the end of the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. This day of commemoration is the highest Holy Day of the Muslim calendar and is called the Feast of Sacrifice (*'Id al-Adha*) or the Great Feast (*al-'Id al-Kabir*). Muslims throughout the world gather for a morning prayer, pay alms to the poor, and then sacrifice a ram, designating a portion of the sacrifice for those who are less fortunate.

According to Muslim belief, the Hajj and its rites, including the sacrifice, were not originated by Muhammad; they were first consecrated by Abraham and Ishmael. In one of Abraham's visits to the desert where Hagar and Ishmael had settled, he was instructed to build the sanctuary of the Ka'ba in the valley of Mecca, also known as "Baca," and establish the annual pilgrimage:

> We established for Abraham the place of the House, [saying], "Do not associate anything with Me, and purify My House for those who circumambulate it, those who stand, and those who bow down. And announce the pilgrimage to the people, that they may come to you by foot and by every lean mount, coming from every deep ravine; that they may bear witness to the blessings they have and remember the name of God on specific days."

(Qur'an 22:26–28)

In another verse, the command, "Purify My house," is addressed to both Ishmael and Abraham (Qur'an 2:125). According to Muslim historians, Abraham and Ishmael built the Ka'ba together on the site where Adam had built a sanctuary 20 generations before. The final piece of the Ka'ba was the Black Stone, which was brought to Abraham by an angel. Of this stone, the Prophet Muhammad said: "It descended from Paradise whiter than milk, but the sins of the sons of Adam made it black."[13] Having established a line of his progeny in the deserts of Arabia and worked with Ishmael to establish a house of worship in accordance with the command of God, Abraham prayed and thanked God:

> Our Lord, I have settled a line of my offspring in a barren valley at Your Holy House— our Lord— that they may perform prayer. So make the hearts of the people incline to them and nourish them with fruits that they may be grateful... Praise be to God who has granted me Ishmael and Isaac in spite of my old age. Truly, my Lord hears supplications.

(Qur'an 14:37–39)

Abraham's prayer was granted, and the Ka'ba became a site of worship visited by pilgrims from Arabia and beyond. According to Muslim historians, the Arabs kept the covenant of Abraham through circumcision and pure

monotheism. In recognition of this bond, the Ka'ba was honored by the descendants of both Ishmael and Isaac. The pilgrimage to Mecca or "Baca" is thus consecrated in a Psalm of David:

> Blessed are those whose strength is in You,
> And who have set their hearts on a pilgrimage.
> As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
> They make it a place of springs;
> The autumn rains also cover it with pools.
> They go from strength to strength
> Until each appears before God in Zion.
>
> (*Psalms* 84:5–7)

In later generations, the Ka'ba came to be contaminated by the polytheism of the surrounding Arab tribes. Through the course of time, the rites of worship that had been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael were forgotten. Nonetheless, there remained in Arabia a few lone worshippers, who continued to follow the religion of Abraham and Ishmael. These were known as the *hunafa'* (sing. *hanif*), or "True Devotees." However, by the time of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century CE, few remained who practiced the traditions of Abraham.[14] Thus, when the Prophet Muhammad reestablished the proper observance of the pilgrimage toward the end of his life, the term "the legacy of Abraham" was constantly upon his lips.

MOSES IN THE QUR'AN

Although the Prophet Muhammad is seen in Islam as a renewer of the primordial religion of Abraham and the Qur'an alludes to correlations between Abraham and Muhammad in their confrontations with idolaters, the most prominent Messenger in the whole of the Qur'an is Moses. The basic outline of the story of Moses and the Israelites in the Qur'an is the same as that in the Bible. His mother entrusts him to the waters of the Nile, and he is found and raised in the house of Pharaoh. However, in the Qur'an it is the wife of Pharaoh, not Pharaoh's daughter, who finds Moses. When he comes of age, Moses kills an Egyptian who was abusive toward a Jew. He then flees to the land of Midian, where he marries a daughter of Jethro (the Prophet Shu'ayb in the Qur'an) and serves him for 8–10 years as part of his marriage pact. As he returns to Egypt, Moses begins his prophetic mission with his encounter with the burning bush.

> Go to Pharaoh. He has been insolent, but speak gently to him, that he may be mindful, or perchance fear. "Our Lord," said Moses and Aaron, "truly we fear that he may transgress against us, or be insolent." "Fear not," said He, "Surely I shall be with you, hearing and seeing. So go you both to Pharaoh and say, 'We

> are the Messengers of your Lord, so send forth with us the Children of Israel and chastise them not.'"
>
> (Qur'an 20:43–47)

This confrontation with Pharaoh is the most frequently referenced aspect of Moses's story in the Qur'an. It is directly mentioned in 10 separate passages and alluded to in several others.[15] It is often seen by Muslims as foreshadowing the Prophet Muhammad's confrontation with the leaders of Mecca. The penultimate condemnation of Pharaoh's unbelief in the Qur'an comes not from Moses but from "a believing man from the people of Pharaoh who concealed his belief" (Qur'an 40:28). He rebukes Pharaoh for rejecting Moses's message and for demanding that Moses be slain:

> What, will you slay a man because he says, "My Lord is God," even though he has brought you clear signs from your Lord? If he is a liar, his lying is upon his own head; but if he is truthful, some of what he promises you will surely beset you. Truly, God does not guide the one who is prodigal and a liar. O my people, today the kingdom is yours, as masters in the land. But who will help us against the might of God if it comes upon us?
>
> (Qur'an 40:28–29)

The man compares the disbelief of Pharaoh and his people to that of those who had previously disbelieved the Prophets Noah and Joseph and concludes with a warning: "As for those who dispute about the signs of God, without any authority having come to them, hateful is this in the sight of God and the believers; so God puts a seal on every proud and arrogant heart" (Qur'an 40:34–35).

As in the Bible, Moses's initial warnings are followed by many afflictions from God until Pharaoh relents and releases the Israelites. Pharaoh then follows the Israelites with his army, only to be swallowed alive by the Red Sea. However, here the Qur'an provides another new twist when Pharaoh confesses his belief in Moses immediately before he perishes, saying, "I believe that there is no god except He in whom the children of Israel believe; and I am among the submitters" (Qur'an 10:90).

As the Israelites march toward the Promised Land, the Qur'anic account continues to follow that of the Bible. Although they are acknowledged as the chosen people whom God has favored over others (Qur'an 2:47; 2:122; 45:16), the Israelites are also portrayed as an ungrateful and contentious community that continually questions the authority of Moses. As in the Bible, Moses is called to Mount Sinai, where he stays for 40 days and returns to find that the people have forsaken all that had been ordained by worshiping the golden calf. In the Qur'an, however, it is not Aaron who is blamed for this transgression. Instead, it is a man referred to as "the Samaritan" (*al-Samiri*) who tells the people, "This is your God and the God of Moses; he has

forgotten'' (Qur'an 20:88). As in the Biblical account, Moses becomes infuriated and destroys the tablets given to him by God (Qur'an 7:150). He then returns to the mountain and receives a new set of tablets. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an does not list the commandments given to Moses, although each of them can be found in various places and forms throughout the text.

Upon reaching the Promised Land, the Israelites again disobey Moses, fearing its inhabitants:

> ''O my people'' [said Moses], ''enter the Holy Land that God has ordained for you, and turn not back in your traces, for you will then revert to [being] losers.'' They said, ''Moses, there are tyrannical people in it. Surely, we will not enter it until they depart from it. If they depart from it, then surely we will enter.'' . . . They said, ''Moses, we will not enter it so long as they remain in it. So go forth, you and your Lord and do battle; we will be sitting here.''
>
> (Qur'an 5:21–24)

For their intransigence the Israelites are banished from entering the Holy Land for 40 years: ''Said [God], 'Then it shall be forbidden to them for forty years, while they wander throughout the Earth''' (Qur'an 5:26).

As with the story of Abraham and his people, the Qur'anic story of Moses is recounted in a way that bears many similarities to the struggles that the Prophet Muhammad faced with his community. Both Moses and Muhammad began receiving revelations at the age of 40. Both were called to confront recalcitrant and impious rulers, over whom they achieved victory. Each was forced to flee his home in order to found a new religion. Most important, each brought a complete revealed law that governs both the religious and the communal lives of their peoples. In this vein, many Muslims have read the following account of a future Moses-like Prophet in the Torah as an allusion to the Prophet Muhammad:

> The Lord said unto me, ''They have well spoken that which they have spoken. Therefore, I will raise for them *a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto you [Moses]*, and will put My words in his mouth. And he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.
>
> (Deuteronomy 18:17–18, emphasis added)

The Qur'an itself refers to such biblical allusions to the Prophet Muhammad in the following passage:

> My mercy encompasses all things. Therefore, I shall ordain for those who are God-fearing and pay the alms tax, and those who believe in Our signs, who follow the Messenger, the Unlettered Prophet (Muhammad), whom they find written down for them in the Torah and the Gospel, commanding them to do good and forbidding them from evil, making good things lawful for them and

> making unseemly things unlawful, and relieving them of their loads and the fetters that were upon them. Those who believe in him, succor him, aid him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him—they are the ones that will prosper.
>
> (Qur'an 7:155–156)

JESUS AS A MESSENGER

Perhaps the most controversial aspects of the Islamic understanding of Prophets and Messengers are the teachings regarding Jesus. Jesus is accepted as one of the five Messengers who possess steadfastness (*uluw al-azm*) and is referred to in the Qur'an as the Word of God (Qur'an 3:45; 4:171). He is aided by the Holy Spirit (Qur'an 2:87; 2:253; 5:110) and is regarded as the Messiah (*al-Masih*), but he is not accepted as the Son of God or as God incarnate.[16] The belief in the incarnation of Jesus is in fact repudiated in several verses: "They disbelieve who say, 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary'" (Qur'an 5:17; 5:72). Other verses of the Qur'an explicitly deny that God has a son:

> They say that God has a son. Glory be to [God]! Rather, to [God] belong all that is in the heavens and the earth; everything is obedient to Him.
>
> (Qur'an 2:116)

> The Christians say the Messiah is the "son of God." That is what they say with their mouths; they imitate the words of those who disbelieved before. May God fight them; how deceived are they!
>
> (Qur'an 9:30)

> It is not for God to take a son. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a matter, He simply says to it "Be!" and it is.
>
> (Qur'an 19:35)

Following upon these arguments, the Qur'an emphasizes that Jesus was not God, but a servant and Messenger of God: "The Messiah does not disdain to be a servant to God" (Qur'an 4:172); "The Messiah, the son of Mary is but a Messenger; Messengers before him have passed away. His mother was truthful and both of them ate food [like normal human beings]" (Qur'an 5:75).[17] Despite his humanity, Jesus still has a special place among the Prophets of Islam. Regarding the place of Jesus in relation to the other Prophets and Messengers, the Qur'an says:

> These are the Messengers. We have preferred some of them to others. Among them is the one to whom God spoke [Moses]. We raised some of them by degrees; and We gave Jesus the son of Mary the clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit.
>
> (Qur'an 2:253)

The best example of Jesus being preferred over other Prophets is the miracle of the virgin birth, to which the Qur'an attests:

> And mention in the Book Mary, when she withdrew from her people to an eastern place, secluding herself from them. Then We sent to her Our spirit, which appeared to her as a man. She said, "Truly I seek refuge in the All-Merciful from you, if you be God-fearing." He said, "I am but a Messenger from your Lord, to give you a sinless son." She said, "How shall there be a son to me when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?" He said, "Thus says your Lord, 'That is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign for the people and a mercy from Us. It is a thing decreed.'"
>
> (Qur'an 19:16–21; see also 3:45–47)[18]

The chapter of Mary in the Qur'an also tells of the virgin birth, providing details not found in any of the Gospel accounts:

> She carried [Jesus in her womb] and then withdrew with him to a far-off place. When the labor pains drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, she said: "Would that I had died before this and had been utterly forgotten!" Then he (an angel?) called to her from under the tree: "Do not grieve, for your Lord has placed a stream beneath you. Shake the trunk of the palm tree and ripe dates will fall upon you. Eat and drink and be of good cheer. And if you see any person, say: 'I have consecrated a fast to the All-Merciful, so I will not speak to anyone today.'"[19] Then she came with [Jesus] to her people. They said, "O Mary! You have brought a grave thing! O sister of Aaron,[20] your father was not a bad man, nor was your mother unchaste." She pointed to him. They said, "How can we speak to one who is an infant in the cradle?" [Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet. He has made me a blessing wherever I am and has ordained for me prayer and almsgiving so long as I live; and He has made me devoted to my mother and did not make me a wretched tyrant. Peace upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive."
>
> (Qur'an 19:22–33)

The Prophet Muhammad is said to have confirmed that of all human beings only Jesus and the Virgin Mary were born without the stain of sin: "There is none born among the offspring of Adam, but that Satan touches it. A child, therefore, cries loudly at the time of its birth because of the touch of Satan, except for Mary and her child."[21]

Not only was the birth of Jesus a miracle but other passages also bear witness to a creative life-giving power possessed by Jesus that was not granted to any other Prophet:

> Truly, I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Truly, I will create for you the figure of a bird from clay, and I will breathe into it so that it becomes a real bird by the will of God. And I heal the blind and the leper, and I will give life to the dead by the will of God. And I will inform you of what you eat and of what you store in your houses. Surely in that is a sign for you if you are believers.

(Qur'an 3:49)

> Then God said, ''O Jesus son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I supported you through the Holy Spirit. You speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity. And I taught you the Book and the Wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel. And when you create the figure of a bird from clay and you breathe into it, then it is a real bird, by My will. You heal the blind and the lepers by My will; and you raise the dead by My will.''

(Qur'an 5:110)

Like Christians, Muslims believe that Jesus will return at the end of time to make justice reign on earth. As the Prophet Muhammad says, ''By Him in whose hand is my soul, the son of Mary will soon descend among you as a just judge.''[22] This is another way in which Jesus has a nature that is different not only from other human beings but also from other Messengers and Prophets. Nonetheless, Muslims do not accept the crucifixion of Jesus. As for the Resurrection, he was not raised from the dead but was raised up to the divine presence, as the following passage of the Qur'an attests:

> [The Jews] said, ''Truly, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.'' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear so to them. Those who differ regarding this are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge regarding it, save to follow conjecture, and they certainly did not kill him. Rather, God raised him unto Himself. God is the Mighty, the Wise.

(Qur'an 4:157–158)

Most Muslims, scholars, and laypersons alike view these verses as a straightforward denial of the crucifixion. They maintain that Jesus was assumed directly into heaven and that another was crucified in his place. However, while most Muslim scholars maintain this position, they also aver that God raised Jesus into heaven from life and that he did not suffer a mortal death. As the Qur'an states:

> Then God said, "O Jesus, I am taking you, and raising you unto Me and will purify you of those who disbelieve and will place those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection."
>
> (Qur'an 3:55)

Just as the Prophet Muhammad has a close connection with both Abraham and Moses before him, so too, Muhammad said of himself and Jesus: "I am the most worthy of Jesus the son of Mary in this life and the hereafter."[23] In addition, the Qur'an maintains that Jesus had foreseen that he would be followed by the Prophet Muhammad:

> Then Jesus the son of Mary said, "O Children of Israel, truly I am a Messenger of God unto you, confirming what was before me in the Torah and bringing you good tidings of a Messenger coming after me whose name is Ahmad."
>
> (Qur'an 61:6)[24]

The name Ahmad means, "most praised." It comes from the same root as the name Muhammad (H-M-D), and Muslims have long recognized it as one of the honorific names given to the Prophet by God Himself. This belief is based on a saying of the Prophet Muhammad: "I have several names: I am Muhammad; I am Ahmad; I am *al-Mahy* (literally, "The Eraser"), by means of which God eliminates unbelief."[25]

MUHAMMAD AS THE COMPLETION OF PROPHECY

Although according to Muslim belief, Muhammad came 62 generations after Abraham,[26] the message he brought continually emphasizes the way of Abraham. The pilgrimage to the Ka'ba had continued before the time of Muhammad, but many of its components had been corrupted or forgotten. This is why Muhammad called his followers to "the legacy of Abraham" when he was first able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca with the Muslims. In this vein, the Qur'an states: "Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian; rather he was a true devotee, a submitter (Muslim)" (Qur'an 3:67). This verse should not be understood as a condemnation of previous revelations, for even Jewish and Christian scholars acknowledge that Abraham did not have the same form of religious practice as do they. Rather, this verse is a call to the universality of "submission," which is believed to be at the heart of all religions and is the essence of the Qur'anic view of Islam. From an Islamic perspective, all of the Prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, were submitters who came to help other human beings learn how to fully submit to God. Though they came at different times to different peoples and spoke different languages, their mission was one. Expounding upon this, the Prophet Muhammad said:

> The likeness of me among the Prophets before me is as a man who builds a house and then refines it and beautifies it, except for the place of one brick in a corner [of the house]. Then the people come and walk around it, marveling at it, and saying, "If only this brick were in place." I am the brick and I am the Seal of the Prophets.[27]

This does not indicate the superiority of one Prophet over others. Just as the last brick used in building a house is not thereby superior to the previous bricks, it does bring greater cohesion to the other bricks. This is why the Qur'an is filled with stories of the previous Prophets and why the Prophet Muhammad reprimanded his followers, "Do not make preferences among the Prophets."[28]

Fulfilling its self-proclaimed function as the completion of the cycle of revelation, the Qur'an renews the primordial covenant of Abraham that had been inherited by the Arabs through Ishmael. So too, it reaffirms the covenants of Judaism and Christianity. The final "brick" in the House of Prophecy is thus seen to represent the renewal of the one eternal and everlasting covenant between God and human beings, which continues to be observed in different yet complementary forms. When the history of the Abrahamic religions is considered in the way the Qur'an suggests—as a continuous line of prophecy and revelation from Adam through Abraham and Moses to Muhammad—the supposedly irreconcilable differences between different Messengers and different religions can be seen as different perspectives, rather than as contradictions. In the final analysis, all Messengers and all Prophets affirm the eternal call of the Old and New Testaments: "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13). As the Qur'an says:

> Truly, those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Christians and the Sabeans— whoever believes in God and the Last Day and acts virtuously— they will have their reward from their Lord. No fear shall be upon them, nor shall they grieve.
>
> (Qur'an 2:62; 5:69)

NOTES

1. See also the following verses of the Qur'an: "Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alteration of night and day are signs for those who discern" (Qur'an 3:190); "Look to His fruits, how He makes them bear fruit and causes them to ripen, truly in that are signs for people who believe" (Qur'an 6:99); "Truly in the alteration night and day and what God has created in the heavens and the earth are signs for people who revere" (Qur'an 10:6). See also, Qur'an 16:12; 16:79; *et passim*.

2. Unlike the situation in Judaism and Christianity, not all angels are messengers in Islam. Some are said to carry God's throne while others abide in heaven praising

God continuously with no knowledge of the created order below. Those who do function as messengers serve multiple functions. The only angel who is directly referred to as a messenger in the Qur'an is the Angel Gabriel. In some Muslim traditions 'Azra'il, the Angel of Death, also called the King of Death (*Malik al-Mawt*), functions as a messenger who conducts souls to the afterlife.

3. Muhammad ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya,* ed. Muhammad al-Saqqa et al. (Cairo: Maktabat Muhammad Subayh, 1963), 969.

4. See *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab al-Adab (Book of Etiquette), 119 and *Sahih Muslim,* Kitab Fada'il al-Sahaba (Book of the Virtues of the Prophet's Companions).

5. The translation of the term *hanif* as "true devotee" or "truly devout" is adopted from Muhammad Asad, who also translates the term as "devout." Asad explains: "The expression *hanif* is derived from the verb *hanafa,* which literally means 'he inclined towards [a right state or tendency].' Already in pre-Islamic times, this term had a definitely monotheistic connotation, and was used to describe a man who turned away from sin and worldliness and from all dubious beliefs, especially idol-worship; *tahannuf* denoted the ardent devotions, mainly consisting of long vigils and prayers, of the unitarian God-seekers of pre-Islamic times." Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an: Translated and Explained* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus Limited, 1984), 28, n. 110 on verse 2:135.

6. Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices,* trans. and ed. Reza Shah-Kazemi (London: IB Tauris, 2001), 61.

7. The word *zubur* is here translated as "scriptures." The singular name *al-Zabur* identifies the revelation given to the Prophet David (Qur'an 4:163; 17:55). *Zubur* could thus be translated as "Psalms" or "scriptures."

8. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab al-Anbiya' (Book of the Prophets), 48.

9. For a discussion of the presentation of Biblical prophets in the Qur'an, see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2002).

10. For Torah passages about God's promise to Abraham, see the following: "And in you all the families of the Earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3); "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18); "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4).

11. See also Qur'an 6:86; 37:113; 38:46.

12. For a comprehensive account of the different interpretations of the sacrifice of Abraham in the Islamic scholarly tradition, see Reuven Firestone, *Journeys into Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis,* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

13. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi,* Kitab al-Hajj (Book of the Pilgrimage), 49.

14. For a brief account of the history of the Ka'ba in the generations preceding Islam, see Martin Lings, *Mecca: From Before Genesis Until Now* (Cambridge: Archetype Books, 2004).

15. Qur'an 2:49–50; 7:103–138; 10:75–92; 11:96–99; 14:5–6; 17:101–104; 20:46–79; 23:45–49; 25:35–36; 26:10–68; 28:3–6, 36–42; 40:23–47; 43:46–56; 44:17–33; 51:38–40; 54:41–42; 73:15–16; 79:20–26.

16. Qur'an 3:45; 4:157; 4:171–172; 5:17 twice; 5:72 twice; 5:75; 9:30–31, *et passim.*

17. From one perspective, such verses can be seen as a reference to Jesus' human nature and are an extension of the verses in the Gospel of John where Jesus states that he was sent by the Father. See John 5:23; 5:30; 5:36–37; 6:39; 6:44; 6:57; 8:16; 8:18; 8:29; 8:42; 10:36; 12:49; 14:24; 17:21; 17:25; 20:21; *et passim.*

18. This is similar to the account of the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke, according to which Mary shows fear and asks the Angel Gabriel: "How will this be since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34) To this Gabriel responds, "There is no deed that is impossible for God" (Luke 1:37).

19. The reference to a voice calling to Mary from under the palm tree has been understood by some exegetes as a reference to Jesus. Others see it as a reference to an angelic Messenger. Taken in light of the Muslim belief that the Qur'an clarifies and affirms previous scriptures but does not necessarily contradict them, the latter interpretation seems more viable.

20. The epithet "Sister of Aaron" is used here in reference to Mary's line of descent through her mother Anne from the Essenes, who were descendants of Aaron. For this lineage, see *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations, from the Visions of the Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich,* Vol. 1 (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers Inc., 2004) 117–120.

21. See *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab Ahadith al-anbiya' (Book of Accounts of the Prophets), 51; Kitab al-tafsir (Book of Qur'an Exegesis), 33. Another account of this saying reads: "No child is born but that he is pricked by Satan and begins to weep because of the pricking of Satan, except for the son of Mary and his mother." See *Sahih Muslim,* Kitab al-Fada'il (Book of Virtues), 40. A third version states: "Satan touches every son of Adam on the day when his mother gives birth to him, except for Mary and her son" (Ibid.).

22. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab Ahadith al-anbiya,' 50.

23. Ibid., 48.

24. Some Muslims have argued that references to the Paraclete in the Gospel of John (John 14:15–16; 16:7–14) refer in fact to the Prophet Muhammad. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate such claims objectively.

25. See *Sahih Muslim,* Kitab al-Fada'il, 34.

26. The lineage from Abraham to Muhammad is as follows: Abraham, Ishmael, Kedar, ʻAdnan (40th descendant from Kedar) Maʻad, Nizar, Mudar, Ilyas, Mudrika, Khuzaima, Kinana, al-Nadr, Malik, Quraysh (Fihr), Ghalib, Lu'ayy, Kaʻb, Murra, Kilab, Qusayy, ʻAbd al-Manaf, Hashim, ʻAbd al-Muttalib, ʻAbdallah, and Muhammad.

27. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab al-Manaqib (Book of Excellences), 18.

28. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab Ahadith al-anbiya', 36.

9

The Loom and The Bridge

Barry C. McDonald

The Loom

A unity within a Unity;
Each bird and flower forms a single strand.
The universe reflects a tapestry
Where every thread is woven by God's Hand.

The carpet spreads as far as we can see—
Its weft is Peace, its warp Reality.
To know things deeply and to understand
The loom of God weaves wisdom into man.

The Bridge

Because there cannot be two Absolutes
The Truth is that there is no god but God.
All beauty blossoms from a sacred root
And everything we love flows from the Good.

This knowledge is a bridge to Paradise.
These words, forever new, can set us free.
Each day we rise and walk into the light,
The heart knows more than what the eye can see.

10

The *Sunna:* The Way of the Prophet Muhammad

Hamza Yusuf Hanson

From the time of the Prophet Muhammad to the present day, the *Sunna,* the Way of the Prophet, has had a profound influence on the daily life of Muslims, providing guidance in both the celestial and the mundane aspects of their existence. From the way Muslims raise their open palms in prayer to the way they enter and exit their homes, their source of guidance is the Sunna of the Prophet as handed down through generations from fathers to sons, mothers to daughters, teachers to pupils, and friends to one another. The centrality of the Sunna in their lives is such that when the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, both speaker and listener follow it with a prayer of peace and blessings upon him.

Calligraphic inscriptions of *Hadith,* the Prophet Muhammad's sayings, are found in almost every Muslim's house. And although it might be the death of a loved one that causes a person to pull a book of prophetic wisdom off the shelf, Muslims will at some time or another read his words as recorded by the great Hadith scholars of the past and derive sustenance from them. When a child is born into a Muslim family, the rituals surrounding its birth—whether it be the chewed date given to the newborn as its first taste, the shaving of its hair on the seventh day, or its circumcision—are all derived from the Sunna. When Muslims marry, they often recite the Prophet's marriage sermon at the wedding, and when they die, it is in accordance with the Sunna that the body is washed, wrapped, prayed over, and lowered into its final earthly abode. From cradle to grave, Muslims are influenced, in greater or lesser degrees, by the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Sunna is the second most important source of authority and legislation in Islam after the Qur'an. Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence base the foundation of Islamic Law, the *Shari'a,* on four primary sources: the Qur'an, the Sunna, the consensus of legal scholars (*ijma'*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*). This chapter explores the differences of opinion among authoritative

Muslim scholars as to the precise meaning and application of the word *Sunna*. It also examines a number of important issues related to the Sunna, including the basis of its authority, its relation to the major Hadith collections, its role in the development of Islamic jurisprudence, the contribution of women in collecting and authenticating the Hadith and the Sunna, and the significance of the Sunna in the Sufi tradition. Finally, this chapter examines some of the modern and postmodern critiques of the Sunna, the responses of Muslim scholars to these critiques, and the weighty problems modern Muslims face because of the divergent views on the Sunna.

THE QUR'ANIC BASIS FOR THE AUTHORITY OF THE SUNNA

Islam connotes "submission" or "surrender." According to the Qur'an, it is the true religion of God (Qur'an 3:19). An adult moral agent who enters into this covenant of surrender is a *Muslim,* one who submits to the will of God. Muslims believe that God communicates His will through divine revelation. Like Judaism, which has both a written and an oral tradition in the Pentateuch and the Talmud, respectively, the central traditions of Islam are twofold: the Qur'an, which Muslims accept in its entirety as the revealed Word of God, and the Sunna, which includes the inspired sayings, acts, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. Both the Qur'an and the Sunna were taught by the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an, however, was written down in its entirety during the Prophet's lifetime and was gathered into a single collected work (known as the *mushaf*) after his death. The Sunna was transmitted orally and was written down haphazardly by the first two generations of Muslims. After approximately 70 years, the process of systematically collecting the sayings, acts, and approvals of the Prophet began and continued well into the third century of Islamic history.

According to the majority of Muslim scholars, the basis of the authority of the Sunna is found in the Qur'an. One verse that establishes the authority of the Sunna states: "Take whatever the Messenger has brought you, and avoid whatever he has prohibited" (Qur'an 59:7). Early scholars understood this verse to refer to the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. The jurist Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820) was the formulator of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*). In his famous work, *al-Risala* (The Epistle), he notes that in the Qur'an, the word "Book" (meaning the Qur'an) is paired seven times with the word "wisdom" (*hikma*). For Shafi'i, the Book and the Wisdom are the Qur'an and the Sunna. One verse of the Qur'an that proves this states: "[God] is the one who sent among the unlettered peoples (*al-ummiyyin*) a Messenger who recited His signs to them and purified them and who taught them the Book (that is, the Qur'an) and the Wisdom (that is, the Sunna)" (Qur'an 62:2).

According to the scholars, the obligation of referring to the Sunna as a source of legislation is derived from the verses in the Qur'an that command believers to "obey God and obey the Messenger" (Qur'an 5:92; 24:54). The Qur'an states: "By your Lord, they do not truly believe until they make you [Muhammad] the arbiter in controversies among them, and until they find in their souls no objection to what you decide, but accept approvingly" (Qur'an 4:65). In another verse, the Qur'an warns: "Let those who oppose [the Messenger's] command beware lest a trial befall them, or a painful punishment strike them" (Qur'an 24:63). The Qur'an also states: "Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those with authority among you. If you dispute over anything, refer it to God and to the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day. That is best and most excellent as a determination" (Qur'an 4:59). Perhaps the most explicit verse in this regard is the following: "Whoever obeys the Messenger is obedient to God" (Qur'an 4:80).

Many Hadith accounts also refer to the importance of the Sunna. Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) related a hadith in which the Prophet said: "I counsel you to conscious awareness of God, and to hearing and obeying. Those among you who will live shall see much tribulation and bickering, so follow my way (that is, the Sunna) and the way (Sunna) of the rightly-guided leaders who follow me."[1] In the *Muwatta'* (The Trodden Path), the earliest extant collection of legislation by the Prophet and his Companions, the jurist Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 CE) relates the following admonition of the Prophet to the Muslim community: "I have left two things by which, as long as you do not abandon them, you will never go astray: the Book of God and my Sunna."[2]

The Qur'an also states that the role of the Prophet vis-à-vis the Qur'an is to clarify its meanings and provide explanations for its verses: "And We revealed to you the Reminder, that you might clarify to people what had been revealed to them, and that they might reflect" (Qur'an 16:44). This clarification is part of the Prophet's Sunna. Without the Sunna, people would not know how to perform ablution (*wudu'*), perform the five daily prayers (*Salat*), perform the Friday congregational prayer (*jumu'a*), make the call to prayer (*adhan*), and perform many other actions required of Muslims that are not explained in the Qur'an.

There are numerous statements from the Companions of the Prophet (*al-Sahaba*) confirming that one of the purposes of the Sunna is to clarify the meaning of the Qur'an. For example, 'Ali ibn Abu Talib (d. 661 CE), the fourth Caliph of Islam, sent the Prophet's cousin Ibn 'Abbas (d. 687 CE) to debate with a group of Muslims called the Khawarij (The Seceders). Because of their misunderstanding of several verses in the Qur'an, the Khawarij considered grave sinners to be unbelievers. Before sending Ibn 'Abbas to talk to the Khawarij, 'Ali advised him: "Do not use the Qur'an to argue with them, for it can be interpreted in many ways. Rather, debate with them using the Sunna, for they cannot escape its clarity."[3]

Although the exact content of the Sunna was widely debated in the first centuries of Islam, by the fourth century (ninth century CE), scholars had agreed upon certain methodologies for determining the content of the Sunna. Imam Shafi'i, after whom the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence was named, codified this methodology in his *Risala*. One of his primary objectives in writing this book was to establish the authority of the Sunna alongside that of the Qur'an. In it, he states:

> God said: "The believers are only those who have faith in God and His Messenger without wavering, and strive for the sake of God by means of their property and their persons. They are the ones who are sincere" (49:15). Thus, God prescribed that the perfect beginning of the faith, to which all other things are subordinate, is the belief in Him and then in His Messenger. For if a person believes only in [God] and not in His Messenger, he cannot be described as one who has "perfect faith"; he must have faith in His Messenger together with Him .... God has imposed the duty upon men to obey His divine communications as well as the Sunna of His Messenger.[4]

DEFINITIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE SUNNA

In classical Islamic scholarship, definitions are divided into three categories: linguistic (*lughawi*), customary (*'urfi*), and legal (*shar'i*). Each of these categories may include more than one meaning for any given term. Thus, a single word may have several linguistic, customary, and legal meanings. In the case of *Sunna*, its linguistic meaning is "path" or "custom" because it connotes the "norms or practices of a people." Its customary meaning refers to "acts of worship that are not obligatory but encouraged in Islam," such as the performance of extra prayers before or after the obligatory prayers. Its legal meaning may differ depending on the legal school of thought.

The three main groups of scholars that have used the term *Sunna* are Hadith scholars (sing. *muhaddith*), who collect and authenticate the sayings of the Prophet; jurists (sing. *qadi*), who apply the rules of the Shari'a in daily life; and juridical theorists (sing. *faqih* or *mufti*), who derive legal opinions (sing. *fatwa*) from the systematic analysis of Qur'an and Hadith. Hadith scholars use the term *Sunna* to refer to anything attributed to the Prophet, including his words, deeds, and tacit approvals, as well as descriptions of his appearance and character—including, even, how he sat, slept, and ate. Some also include in this definition the actions of the Prophet's Companions and their students. Jurists use the term *Sunna* to refer to behaviors that are recommended as praiseworthy but are not mandated by law. Juridical theorists, who use the Sunna in formulating legal opinions, consider it as "anything attributed to the Prophet, either in explicit word, deed, or tacit approval."[5] Certain scholars among this latter group added to the definition of Sunna personal qualities that the Prophet embodied. However, the most

authoritative definition of the Sunna remained the actual words of the Prophet, his actions, and matters that he sanctioned.

The first category of the Sunna comprises the *statements* of the Prophet as recorded by his Companions in Hadith literature, such as, "Let there be no harm and no reciprocating harm,"[6] or "The water of the ocean is pure, and its carrion is permissible"[7] (unlike land animals, which must be slaughtered properly). The second category of the Sunna consists of the *actions* of the Prophet as recorded by his Companions. For example, the Prophet stated, "Pray as you see me pray." Thus, the *Salat* prayer that Muslims perform five times a day is based on the Companions' descriptions of the Prophet's actions when he prayed.

Prophetic actions fall under three subcategories. The first subcategory consists of the Prophet Muhammad's personal preferences and activities, such as his likes and dislikes. Sufis tend to emphasize these aspects of the Prophet's behavior, but most juridical scholars argue that such matters are not part of the Sunna. Instead, they are regarded as mere cultural habits of the Arabian Peninsula or are seen to reflect personal preferences that have no legal value. The West African authority on the Sunna, 'Abd Allah Ould Hajj Ibrahim (d. 1814 CE) commented on this subject as follows: "The Prophet sometimes performed acts that he himself discouraged in order to clarify their permissibility. Also, any of his actions that resulted from his particular nature, such as what and how he ate or drank, or how he sat or stood up, do not fall under the rubric of Sunna."[8] Despite such qualifications, many Muslims follow the Prophet's personal practices out of love and devotion. Hence, some Muslims wear a ring on either the ring finger or small finger, sit on the floor when eating, or eat with their hands because the Prophet did so. Some Muslims even avoid foods that the Prophet avoided and prefer foods that he preferred.

The second subcategory involves actions of the Prophet that were legislated by God specifically for him. For instance, God commanded the Prophet in the Qur'an to stand in prayer for at least a third of the night and obliged him to pray extra prayers every morning. Pious actions such as these are encouraged for ordinary believers but are not obligatory for anyone but the Prophet himself. Similarly, the Prophet was allowed to fast for days without food or water, but he prohibited such extreme fasts for his followers. The license to marry more than four women at one time also falls under this category. While this practice was permissible for the Prophet, it is prohibited for others. The Prophet exercised this dispensation by marrying older women, divorcées, widowed single mothers, and women whose tribal ties strengthened the unity of the Muslim community. Although Islam allows Muslim men to marry up to four women at a time, no jurist considers this practice part of the Sunna. Rather, it is merely a permissible act and sometimes it is even prohibited. Many jurists discourage this practice because of the near impossibility of treating wives equally, as the Qur'an demands. According to the Maliki school of law, a woman entering into a marriage

has the right to stipulate that the man will not take another wife without divorcing her.

The third subcategory of the Prophet's acts consists of actions that are neither part of his particular nature nor from his special obligations and dispensations. These consist of cultural habits that the Prophet picked up by virtue of his participation as a member of seventh-century Arab society.

The third category of the Sunna includes acts that are *sanctioned* by the Prophet. For the most part, the Prophet's Companions performed these acts in his presence. Such acts were either approved by the Prophet directly or approved by his silence. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet was not permitted by God to remain silent in the presence of a prohibited act. For instance, the Prophet once inquired about the condition of a young boy's bird that he kept as a caged pet in his house. Because the Prophet did not prohibit the boy from keeping the bird in a cage, it is understood that keeping birds as pets is permissible. Thus, the Prophet's Sunna is seen as sanctioning the keeping of pets. According to some scholars, over 300 rulings were derived from this one hadith, including the Sunna of inquiring about people's pets and the permissibility of keeping a bird in a cage.

Some scholars consider *Sunna* a synonym for *Hadith,* while others consider *Hadith* to be a reference to the words of the Prophet and therefore more specific than the Sunna. In spite of this scholarly distinction, the words "Sunna" and "Hadith" are largely synonymous in the minds of most Muslims. The term *Sunna,* which is mentioned 16 times in the Qur'an to refer to "precedent" or "custom," is used specifically in collections of Hadith to refer to the normative practice of the Prophet. In early Islam, "Sunna" connoted the normative practice of the Muslim community that was either legislated or sanctioned by the Prophet. Under the influence of Imam Shafi'i, the term *Sunna* came to refer specifically to the Prophet's practice as embodied in sound Hadith. Today, Sunna refers to what Muslims consider the practice and behavior of the Prophet as recorded by his Companions and collected by the great Hadith scholars of Islamic history. Even the Maliki school of jurisprudence (followed mostly in North and West Africa), which in earlier times had favored a broader application of the term, has largely capitulated to the current usage of the term. The efforts of the Hadith scholars in collecting and systematizing Prophetic traditions enabled the jurists to glean from them the normative practice of the Prophet, based on the respective schools' methodologies.[9] One useful way to distinguish Hadith from Sunna is described as follows:

> Hadith differs from Sunna in the sense that Hadith is a narration of the conduct of the Prophet whereas Sunna is the example or the law that is deduced from it. Hadith in this sense is the vehicle or the carrier of the Sunna, although Sunna is a wider concept and used to be so especially before its literal meaning gave way to its juristic usage.[10]

According to Imam Shafi'i, most scholars agreed that the concept of Sunna comprised the following three categories: (1) Qur'anic legislations that the Prophet specified or elucidated, (2) the Prophet's clarifications of ambiguities in the Qur'an, and (3) actions the Prophet performed that are not mentioned in the Qur'an. According to Shafi'i, scholars unanimously accepted the first two categories but disagreed about the third, since it lacked a supportive text from the Qur'an itself. In the *Risala,* Shafi'i provides many examples of the first two categories and establishes the soundness of the third. He concludes: "As for the Sunna, which [the Prophet] laid down on matters for which a text is not found in the Book of God, the obligation to accept them rests upon us by virtue of the duty imposed by God to obey the [Prophet's] command."[11]

Today, all of the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence accept all three categories of the Sunna. For example, the times for prayer and how they are performed fall under the third category of the Sunna. Neither the prayer times nor how to pray is clearly elucidated in the Qur'an. An example of the Sunna allowing exceptions to Qur'anic injunctions is found in the requirement to make an ablution before praying: while the Qur'an requires washing the feet, the Sunna provides the dispensation of wiping over a covered foot with wet hands.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUNNA

Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493 CE), a prominent Maliki jurist and Sufi from North Africa, identified three stages in the formation of Islamic theology and law. The first was the *prophetic stage,* during which the Prophet's Companions and those who learned from them absorbed what the Prophet taught. The second was the *compilation stage,* the period in which the Qur'an and the Hadith were compiled into the form we have today. Last was the *codification stage,* in which the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna were examined and codified into devotional practice and Sacred Law. The scholars who codified the sayings and actions of the Prophet fell under two categories: biographers (*'ulama' al-Sira*) and Hadith scholars (*muhaddithun*). The biographers of the Prophet were liberal in their narrations and did not authenticate the stories and sayings they related with great rigor. This caused the jurists to reject their narrations as a source of legislation. *Sira,* biographical literature about the Prophet Muhammad, does not have legislative authority. It is primarily read as devotional literature, since knowing the Prophet's biography draws one nearer to him. In a more systematic sense, it is also read as sacred history and serves to contextualize verses of the Qur'an that refer to events that occurred during the Prophet's lifetime.

Unlike the biographers, Hadith scholars developed a rigorous science that enabled them to determine, with a high degree of accuracy, the veracity of

the many traditions that circulated among common people and scholars alike. The most important element in the assessment of Hadith is the reliability of the chain of transmission (*sanad* or *isnad*). In order to be accepted, a hadith must be transmitted by a chain of reliable narrators who relate it as closely to the original as possible. Scholars allow hadith accounts to be transmitted in different words, as long as the same meaning is retained.

In addition, scholars classified hadith accounts into three broad categories: sound (*sahih*), good (*hasan*), and weak (*da'if*). Sound hadith are subcategorized into narratives that are supported by multiple chains of transmission at every stage (*mutawatir*), narratives that are supported by multiple chains of transmission at most stages (*mashhur*), and solitary (*ahad*) narratives that are not supported by multiple chains of transmission. *Mutawatir* hadith are akin to verses in the Qur'an in terms of their authority; there are less than 500 such hadith. The hadith that are categorized as *mashhur* are those narratives that have many transmitters but do not reach a number that ensures infallibility. Finally, the solitary reports are hadith that have either one or at most a few transmitters in any given generation.

In the early stages of his mission, the Prophet initially prohibited people from writing down his sayings out of concern that the Qur'an would be confused with his own words. In the later part of his mission, however, once the Qur'an was firmly rooted in the hearts of his followers, he did permit his Companions to record his words. While Hadith scholars have differed over the authenticity of numerous hadith and have agreed that many hadith accounts were fabricated for political or other purposes, Muslims do not question the authenticity of Hadith as a reliable source of Islamic knowledge in general. Recently, however, some Muslim scholars have raised the question of hadith's authenticity. In the last hundred years, largely because of Orientalist critiques of Hadith literature, certain views have developed that challenge the validity of much of the Hadith literature that was formerly considered beyond reproach. As a result, a minority of Muslims, especially in South Asia, rejected most hadith accounts altogether and demanded that the practice of Islam be based solely on the Qur'an. These "People of the Qur'an" (*Ahl al-Qur'an*) were countered by "People of the Hadith" (*Ahl al-Hadith*), who revered Hadith almost as much as they revered the Qur'an. A main responsibility of the juridical schools of Islam is to refute such extreme positions through a critical yet balanced approach to Hadith study.

THE HADITH COLLECTIONS

Hadith scholars spent over 300 years collecting, authenticating, and systematizing the corpus of Hadith. A rigorous science developed from this painstaking endeavor and provided the heuristic tools for categorizing and further subcategorizing the Hadith. Many great scholars emerged from this

discipline, and some achieved great prominence as their collections gained widespread acceptance among the majority of Muslims. Certain Hadith collections known as *sunan* constitute the injunctions and prohibitions of the Prophet and focus on the legal aspects of his sayings. Others include stories of his life, such as his childhood experiences, and the sayings of his Companions and their students. Some collections include the opinions of the scholars who collected the Hadith.

In the Sunni tradition, which currently represents more than 80 percent of the Muslim world, six Hadith collections achieved a preeminent status. A seventh collection, the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik, is usually added to this group. The *Muwatta'* is an account of the Sunna in Medina, the city of the Prophet, and is considered an important source of early Muslim practice. Of the 1,720 traditions in this collection, only 822 are attributed to the Prophet himself. The rest are from his Companions and their students. Malik attempted to discern the normative practice of the entire community of the Prophet. He understood that the Sunna could include practices performed by the Prophet's companions in his presence and of which he did not disapprove.

Of the six major collections of Hadith, the two most important are the *Sahih* of Bukhari (d. 870 CE) and the *Sahih* of Muslim (d. 875 CE). These two leaders of Hadith study employed such rigor that most Sunni scholars believe their collections to be sound in their entirety, with a miniscule probability of error in some of the solitary hadith narratives. Bukhari was known to have memorized over 600,000 different chains of transmission, which involved tens of thousands of hadith accounts. The more chains of transmission a hadith has, the more sound it is, and the more times the text is replicated, especially with exact wording, the more reliable the hadith.

The other four compilations include many traditions not found in the collections of Bukhari and Muslim. Tirmidhi (d. 883 CE), Ibn Maja (d. 886 CE), Abu Dawud (d. 888 CE), and Nasa'i (d. 915 CE) all amassed important collections, though they have a lesser stature than those of Bukhari and Muslim, since their compilations include weak (*da'if*) hadith, while the two *Sahih* collections do not.

While these seven collections are the most important in Sunni Islam, many other collections augment the scholars' knowledge of the hadith and ultimately of the Sunna. For example, Muhammad ibu 'Abdallah al-Hakim's (d. 1014 CE) collection is extremely important, as he attempted to identify hadith accounts that are not in Bukhari and Muslim but nonetheless are authentic, using the same rigorous criteria of authentication that Bukhari and Muslim used. Ahmad ibn Hanbal's *Musnad* is another such collection, comprising over 30,000 hadith, many of which can be found in other collections. Many other Hadith collections exist, most with chapters that cover a broad range of topics. These topics include creed, laws and rulings (*sunan*, including rulings on ritual purity, prayer, marriage, inheritance, and so on), *raqa'iq* (matters that deal with piety and giving up worldly possessions for

Table 10.1: The Hadith Collections

Hadith collector	Number of Hadiths
Bukhari	7,658
Muslim	7,748
Abu Dawud	5,276
Tirmidhi	4,415
Nasa'i	5,776
Ibn Maja	4,485
Malik	1,720
Total	37,078

nobler pursuits), manners (of eating, drinking, traveling, studying, and so on), Qur'anic exegesis, historical and biographical information, seditions, and signs of the end of time.[12]

Of all of the hadith collections, none has achieved the prestige of *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Muslims throughout the world revere this collection as the most important book of religious teachings after the Qur'an, primarily because of the scrupulous rigor of the criteria that Bukhari used to authenticate hadith. His personal piety also contributed to the prestige of this work. In his early childhood, Bukhari was blind for a period; when his sight returned, his mother informed him that the trial he had experienced was due to the will of God and that his sight was restored because God intended for him to serve the Sunna of the Prophet.

Soon after, Bukhari set out to master the hadith of his homeland in Central Asia and spent over four decades traveling throughout the Muslim lands collecting hadith. On many occasions, his prodigious memory was tested by other Hadith scholars who wanted to verify that he was indeed a genius of his reputation. On one occasion in Baghdad, 10 Hadith scholars intentionally introduced some slight alterations in the chains of transmission of hundred traditions in order to test the young man. In a mosque, in the presence of the public, these scholars recited the traditions along with their corresponding chains, which they had changed. Then they began to ask Bukhari questions about them. He confessed his ignorance of the traditions recited and explained that he knew them through other chains. To the astonishment of all who were present, Bukhari then proceeded to recite all hundred chains with their corresponding texts correctly.[13]

The noted Orientalist, H. A. R. Gibb, said about Bukhari's work:

> Viewed as a whole, the *Sahih* is a work of immense interest and scrupulous scholarship. Variants are carefully noted, doubtful or difficult points in the *sanads* (chains of narration) and texts are glossed. On any careful student, the book

> produces a remarkable impression of honesty combined with piety. It may be true, as has been suggested, that the popular appreciation of Bukhari's collection was due largely to the fact that he brought together the traditions already accepted in religious circles as a result of the long preceding process of critical examination, but this does not exclude the element of personal worthiness which set, as it were, the seal of authentication upon them.[14]

Without a doubt, the collection and authentication of the Hadith literature is one of the most fascinating and sophisticated works of premodern scholarship. While the authenticity of hadith accounts has been under severe attack for more than a century, its defenders continue to fight back from both within the tradition and without.

THE SUNNA AND JURISPRUDENCE

Among the first community of Companions who lived and studied directly with the Prophet, a small group emerged that was recognized as more learned than the others. People referred to these Companions concerning legal matters that had no precedent during the lifetime of the Prophet. The jurists among the Companions issued *fatwas,* nonbinding legal opinions. A *fatwa* is nonbinding because another scholar may come to a different conclusion about a subject, as there is often more than one possible interpretation of the source texts.

The source texts for a fatwa are first the Qur'an, since it is the highest authority, and then the Sunna. If an issue is not clearly addressed in the Qur'an or the Sunna, the jurist then looks to see if there is any consensus among the scholars concerning the matter. If no clear proof is found in any of these three sources, the jurist exerts all of his intellectual and spiritual efforts to arrive at a sound position that is consistent with the aims and ends of the Sacred Law, through analogy or one of several other legal considerations. These considerations include analogical reasoning based on already existing texts, equity, public good, permissibility, precedents from previous Muslim scholars, and other legal considerations. This process is based on the following hadith, which is categorized as well known (*mashhur*):

> Before sending Mu'adh [ibn Jabal] to Yemen to act as a judge, the Prophet asked him on what basis he would judge. Mu'adh replied, "I will judge by the Book of God."
>
> The Prophet then asked, "And if you do not find the answer in the Book of God?"
>
> Mu'adh replied, "Then I will judge in accordance with the Sunna of the Messenger of God."
>
> The Prophet then asked, "And if you do not find it in the Sunna of the Messenger of God?"

> Mu'adh replied, "Then I will exert my efforts to the utmost in order to arrive at a sound opinion, and I will spare no effort."[15]

Much of current Islamic Sacred Law is based on *ijtihad*, the exertion of intellectual effort by scholars who attempt to discern the most likely ruling of God in circumstances that are not covered by definitive texts. The jurists use sound hadith as a means to derive legal rulings about various aspects of daily life as well as of events that raise legal issues.

DISCERNING THE SUNNA FROM THE HADITH

There were many independent jurists in the formative period of the Muslim legal tradition, and they differed, sometimes radically, regarding what constituted the Sunna. However, as time passed, seven discernable legal schools formed, which are still a source of guidance for most Muslims today: the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali, Ja'fari, Ibadi, and Zaydi. Each of these schools developed a juristic methodology that enabled it to analyze the vast Hadith literature and to discern the Sunna or the normative practice of the Messenger of God.

Because of different interpretations of texts, these schools developed various methodologies for determining legislation. The Qur'an and the Hadith contain some legal rulings. These rulings form the basis of a large body of legal precedent, from which jurists attempt to ascertain new legal rulings on the basis of common axioms and principles. The outcome of this process, which is the technical definition of the term *ijtihad*, will vary on the basis of theoretical approaches employed.

In rare cases, such as that of Malik ibn Anas, the Hadith scholars were also jurists. Such scholars not only developed legal opinions but also transmitted their own collections of hadith. Malik considered the Sunna to encompass more than the practice of the Prophet, as revealed through his authentic sayings and the sound narrations of his deeds and approvals. Thus, he included in his *Muwatta'* the normative practice of the people of Medina during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Shafi'i believed that the Sunna could be derived from solitary (*ahad*) transmissions of hadith. In other words, if a single Companion of the Prophet related a hadith and the chain of transmission was sound, that hadith could be used to derive a sound ruling, even if no other Companion corroborated the hadith with independent narrations. Abu Hanifa (d. 767 CE) and Malik disagreed with Shafi'i about this. According to Malik, determining legislation by means of solitary narrations would lead to confusion in discerning the Sunna.

An example of different approaches to determining the Sunna can be seen in the case of fasting on Friday, the day of the communal *jumu'a* prayer. Shafi'i accepted a solitary hadith transmitted with a sound chain back to the

Prophet, in which the Prophet prohibited fasting on Fridays except in Ramadan. However, Malik set aside this hadith, preferring the practice of the students of the Prophet's Companions, who were known to fast on Fridays. He reasoned that Medina was the Prophet's city and the place where he spent the last 10 years of his life. Therefore, any practice that was widespread among the scholars of Medina could only have been with the approval of the Prophet's Companions and hence with the approval of the Prophet himself.

While Abu Hanifa agreed with Malik regarding the problem of solitary hadith, he relied on the Qur'an rather than on the precedent of the people of Medina as his primary source. In the absence of a clear ruling from the Qur'an, he referred to the Sunna, but he had rigorous caveats about which hadith he used to determine the Sunna. As supplements to rulings from the Qur'an, he accepted only multiply supported (*mutawatir*) and well-known (*mashhur*) hadith accounts with several narrators in each generation. In addition, he accepted those hadith accounts only if their rulings were actually put into practice by scholars. In the case of solitary hadith, Abu Hanifa would accept only those that a Companion of the Prophet related to a group of other Companions, and so long as no one in the group disagreed with the narration. Abu Hanifa also rejected hadith accounts whose logic he deemed to be contradicting Qur'anic principles.

The fourth Sunni Imam, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, followed a methodology similar to that of Shafi'i. However, like Abu Hanifa and Malik, he accepted traditions that were related by a trustworthy follower of the Prophet's Companions without being traced back to the Prophet himself, while Shafi'i rejected such traditions.

THE SHI'A AND THE SUNNA

The Shi'a community comprises approximately 15 percent of the Muslim world, with the majority of its adherents in Iran and large numbers in Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Afghanistan, India, Yemen, and eastern Saudi Arabia. Like the Sunnis, Shi'as have different schools of thought in their tradition. Most Shi'as belong to the school known as the *Imami* and adhere to the Twelve Imams. Following the Prophet is central to their tradition, but Shi'as give great consideration to the Prophet's direct descendants through his daughter Fatima and cousin 'Ali and ascribe to them a special place of authority within the tradition. The Shi'as also believe in Hadith but usually refer to them as *akhbar* (''news'' or ''reports''). Moreover, they believe that the rulings of the Twelve Imams are as important in matters of faith and law as the Prophet's are. To the Shi'a, the Twelve Imams are considered infallible in religious matters; their authority is akin to that of the Pope in modern Catholicism.

While the Shi'as accept Hadith as a primary source of legislation after the Qur'an, they reject several of the Sunni sources among the Prophet's Companions because of their political positions vis-à-vis the early dispute over 'Ali's authority after the death of the Prophet. While both groups classify hadith almost identically and deem multiple transmission narratives to be authoritative and binding, the Sunnis tend not to accept the methodology of authentication that the Shi'as employ.

For the Shi'as, the Hadith constitutes the Sunna of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams. The Shi'as have four early collections that are considered canonical and akin to the six collections of the Sunnis. Many of the traditions found in the Shi'a collections are similar or identical in meaning to those found in the Sunni sources, and many of the Sunni Hadith scholars narrate hadith on the authority of early Shi'a scholars, with certain qualifications. Shi'a transmitters can even be found in the chains of the illustrious Sunni Hadith scholar Bukhari.[16]

WOMEN AND THE SUNNA

One intriguing aspect of the sciences involving the collection and authentication of Prophetic sayings is the important role that women played in its development and transmission. In no other Islamic disciplines have there been so many notable and illustrious female scholars. Among the Prophet's Companions, only four related over 2,000 traditions; one of them was the Prophet's wife 'A'isha, who holds a preeminent position not only as a great transmitter of hadith but also in her knowledge of their application. Only one other early Hadith scholar bears such a distinction.[17] Perhaps because of 'A'isha's prestigious position among the transmitters, other women were encouraged to pursue knowledge in this area. A student of Hadith will often encounter the names of Hafsa, Umm Habiba, Umm Salama, Maymuna, and 'A'isha; all of these women transmitted hadith directly from the Prophet.

Women represent 12 percent of the Prophet's Companions who are noted for relating more than 20 hadith accounts. Among the second generation of scholars, women also held prominent places. For example, 'Abida al-Madaniyya (d. early eighth century CE) was a slave from Medina who excelled in memorizing traditions from the great Hadith scholars of Medina. The eminent Spanish Hadith scholar Habib Dahhun freed 'Abida and then married her. She returned with him to Spain, and it is reported that she related over 10,000 traditions on the authority of her teachers in Medina.[18]

The most notable scholar of *Sahih al-Bukhari* in the eleventh century CE was Karima al-Marwaziyya (d. 1070 CE) from Merv in modern Turkmenistan, whose name recurs in the most authoritative chains of the *Sahih*. The Hadith scholar Abu Dharr of Herat (d. 1042 CE) held her in such high esteem that he counseled his students to study Bukhari with her and no one else.

The greatest of the later Hadith scholars, Ibn Hajar al-'Askalani (d. 1449 CE), wrote a work of biographical notices titled *al-Durar al-kamina* (The Hidden Pearls), in which he listed over 170 prominent female Hadith scholars. Ibn Hajar studied directly with some of them and acknowledged others as the best Hadith scholars of their age. Noteworthy among the women Hadith scholars mentioned by Ibn Hajar was Umm Hani Maryam of Cairo (d. 1466 CE), who mastered several Islamic sciences, including theology, law, history, and grammar. During her life, she traveled extensively to study Hadith with the masters of her age. She was a celebrated lecturer in the Islamic colleges of Cairo. The Egyptian biographer Sakhawi (d. 1497 CE) says about her:

> She taught hadith for a long time, and many eminent scholars heard them from her; personally, everything I have learned from her teachers, I learned through her. However, I believe that she knew much more than I was able to learn. Her grandfather presumably taught her the rest of the Six Books and taught her Nashawiri's [d. 1388 CE] version of *Sahih al-Bukhari*. She was a good woman who used to weep profusely when the names of God and the Prophet were mentioned; she was consistent in her fasting and night prayers and firm in her religion.... She performed the pilgrimage thirteen times, often staying for months to study and teach in Mecca and Medina.[19]

The great Hadith scholar Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505 CE) states that although there have been countless forgers of hadith among men, no woman in the history of the science was ever known to have been a forger of hadith. Unfortunately, the number of female scholars of Hadith declined radically after the fifteenth century CE. Following Sakhawi's biographical collection, women are almost entirely absent from literature enumerating the scholars of the centuries that followed. Perhaps, the last noteworthy female Hadith scholar in Sunni Islam was Fatima al-Fudayliyya (d. 1831), who acquired an excellent reputation in the early nineteenth century. She taught in Mecca, where many eminent Hadith scholars were known to attend her lectures.[20] Today, one of the most active scholastic communities in the Arab world that is teaching and preserving the great canonical collections of Hadith literature is the Qubaysiyyat of Syria. This organization is made up entirely from the ranks of Syrian women and their female students from around the world.

THE SUFIS AND THE SUNNA

Sufism is the spiritual tradition within Islam, and almost all of the legal and theological schools of both the Sunni and the Shi'a traditions incorporate aspects of Sufism in their teachings. For the Sufis, the Sunna represents more than simply the actions of the Prophet and his normative practices.

While Sufis traditionally were staunch adherents of the outward manifestation of the Sunna, they placed greater emphasis on the spiritual states of the Prophet and his practice of being mindful of God. In Bukhari's collection, 'A'isha relates that the Prophet mentioned God in all of his states. Sufis take this tradition very seriously and attempt to fill their days with remembrance of God, even while doing such mundane tasks as sweeping a room or working at a computer. Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba (d. 1809 CE), the noted North African Sufi and scholar of the early nineteenth century, writes:

> The scholar has inherited [the Prophet's] sayings, may Allah bless him and give him peace, with the condition that he should be sincere and truthful .... The worshipper has inherited [the Prophet's] actions .... The Sufi has inherited everything [from the Prophet]. In the beginning [the Sufi] takes what is necessary for him from the outward knowledge [of the Prophet]. He plunges to its depth and then moves to action in the most perfect states. He has also inherited the behavior that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) used to apply to his inward self: doing without, scrupulousness, fear and hope, patience, forbearance, generosity, courage, contentment, humility, reliance upon Allah, love, gnosis, and so on.[21]

While most Sufis are traditional Muslims in that they adhere to the normative practice of the dominant community of believers, their focus is less on the formalism of exoteric religion than it is on the purpose of that formalism, which is to attain direct knowledge of God. Thus, Sufis consider the spiritual retreats of the Prophet as Sunna. The Night Journey, in which the Prophet is described as having had direct experience of his Lord, is also Sunna for the Sufis. In addition, the Sunna of invocation at night is very important in the Sufi tradition.

Many Hadith scholars were Sufis. In fact, the doctrines of early Sufis, such as Junayd (d. 910 CE), were probably diffused throughout the Muslim world by way of Hadith scholars who were sought after for their knowledge of traditions and who passed on their Sufism along with Hadith. Abu Sa'id ibn al-'A'rabi (d. 952 CE), the famous Hadith scholar and disciple of Junayd, studied with Abu Dawud, the author of one the canonical Six Books. Later, scholars in Islamic Spain taught the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud using Ibn al-'A'rabi's narration. Abu Muhammad Ja'far al-Khuldi (d. 958 CE) is another such example. A distinguished Hadith scholar in his early career, he later became a well-known Sufi who applied the rigors of his Hadith training to the teachings of the Sufis. Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038 CE) was also a great Hadith scholar and Sufi; his renowned work *Hilyat al-awliya'* (The Adornment of the Saints) is a major sourcebook for early Sufi traditions.[22] Finally, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), perhaps the most prominent jurist, theologian, and Sufi in Sunni Islam, placed great emphasis on strictly adhering to the Sunna of the Prophet as a way of achieving spiritual illumination. In his

religious classic *Bidayat al-hidaya* (The Beginning of Guidance), he states: "The commands of God Most High prescribe obligatory works and supererogatory works. The obligatory work is the capital on which the trading activities are based and through which a man comes to safety. The supererogatory [Sunna] work is the profit, which gives a man a higher degree of success."[23] In this work, Ghazali exhorts those setting out on a spiritual path to adhere strictly to the Sunna of the Prophet in order to illuminate their hearts and draw closer to God.

CHALLENGES TO THE SUNNA

While historically the Sunna of the Prophet and the traditions it is based on were not challenged as an epistemological premise in Islam, there have been several recent attempts to challenge the validity of the Hadith. Initially, these attempts came from Orientalist scholars who called into question the entire tradition of Hadith and its methodology for authenticating accounts. Some of these Western scholars went so far as to allege that most hadith accounts were in fact inauthentic and represented an attempt by scholars in the second, third, and fourth centuries of Islam to legitimize legal opinions and cultural attitudes by attributing them to the Prophet Muhammad. According to this view, this process led to the fabrication of chains of narration. One of the most influential exponents of this tradition of Western Hadith criticism was the late nineteenth-century scholar Ignaz Goldziher, a Hungarian specialist in Jewish law who applied his criticisms of the Jewish legal tradition to Islam.

Goldziher's main allegations against the Hadith tradition were as follows: Because hadith accounts were based mainly on oral traditions, they were apt to be remembered incorrectly or misunderstood. The fact that later Hadith collections had larger numbers of accounts than earlier compilations meant that the authenticity of accounts in the later collections was suspect. The system of verifying traditions by means of their chains of transmission was a later development in the field of Hadith study and could not prove the authenticity of a particular hadith account. Many hadith accounts were contradictory and followed inconsistent logic.[24]

The early twentieth-century scholar Joseph Schacht agreed with Goldziher's main criticisms about Hadith and further alleged that most written traditions came into existence only after Shafi'i's time. He asserted that the Prophet Muhammad was not primarily interested in legislation and that legislative hadith emerged during the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE), when the need arose to legitimize state policies. According to Schacht, the Sunna did not originally refer to the Prophet's practices but rather to the practice of the Muslim community as a whole and only received its eventual meaning because of the influence of Shafi'i.[25]

These views continue to have a great deal of influence in the field of Islamic Studies, despite sound challenges to Goldziher's and Schacht's contentions. Schacht's thesis was refuted by the Muslim scholar Muhammad Azami in the book, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.[26] A European Muslim scholar, Yasin Dutton, has written an intriguing work titled *The Origins of Islamic Law: The Qur'an, the Muwatta' and Madinan ʿAmal.* In this work, Dutton argues that the concept of the Sunna, as understood by the Maliki jurists of Medina, refutes the opinions of those who doubt the authenticity of Hadith. Dutton believes that the accuracy of most hadith accounts transmitted by the Maliki school is undeniable and that the Maliki school's reliance on communally applied actions taught and practiced by its scholars, rather than on written texts of largely solitary narrations, is central to its strength. For Dutton, the Sunna is a transmitted practice rooted in action. The majority of solitary hadith do not support this view because their teachings have not been confirmed in actual practice. Malik himself did not rely on solitary hadith accounts, and his *Muwatta'* contains less than 2,000 hadith accounts out of tens of thousands of accounts that were at his disposal. Malik discarded many accounts because they were not practiced by the scholars of his time in Medina. Dutton's research demonstrates that Orientalist criticism of the Sunna based on the supposed weakness of Hadith literature is largely irrelevant to the Maliki position, which clearly distinguishes between Hadith and Sunna.[27]

Other challenges to the Sunna have arisen from within the Muslim community itself. The Egyptian engineer Rashad Khalifah rejected the Hadith tradition in its entirety and demanded that Muslims return solely to the Qur'an. Even more recently, Dr. Muhammad Shahrur, a Syrian engineer, published a critique of the Sunna as understood by classical scholars for over a thousand years. In this work, he claims that the Sunna was the Prophet's personal attempt to apply the Qur'an to his time and his environment. Thus, the meaning of the Sunna should differ according to the time and place in which it is applied. According to Shahrur, Muslims should not follow the practices of the Prophet literally but should instead implement the methodology he used to arrive at his practices. This, says Shahrur, is the Prophet's *ijtihad*.[28]

Finally, an emerging movement of American Muslims, which is largely drawn from the children of Muslim immigrants, is abandoning what they perceive as the stifling effect that Hadith has had on Islam. The followers of this movement feel that Islam should be reformed from within and that many of the centuries-old traditions of Islam must be abandoned for a faith more compatible with modern sensibilities. In his *Risala,* Shafiʿi relates a tradition that appears to foreshadow such views. In this hadith the Prophet says, "Let me find no one of you reclining on his couch when confronted with an order of permission or prohibition from me, saying, 'I do not know it; we will only follow what we find in the Book of God.'"[29]

THE SUNNA AND MODERN MUSLIMS IN THE WEST

The Sunna of the Prophet has been on Western shores for many centuries. In Europe, first in Spain and later in other regions, the Sunna was brought by travelers and merchants from the Muslim East. In the Americas, Muslims were brought in slave ships as well as in trading vessels, and some of them courageously attempted to preserve whatever they could of the Prophet's way. However, never before have such large numbers of Muslims resided in the West. Documentaries about the Prophet have been shown on public television, and English dictionaries now contain the word, "Sunna." Increasingly, Western people are coming to accept the presence of Muslims and their practice of the Sunna.

Muslims in the West are also studying the books of the Sunna, and indigenous Westerners are becoming qualified to teach them. The Hadith collections of Bukhari, Muslim, and Malik are studied daily in schools and Islamic centers in Birmingham and Bradford in the United Kingdom, and in New York City and Hayward, California, in the United States. The Sunna is practiced by engineers in Silicon Valley, gas station attendants in Chicago, and taxi drivers in Philadelphia. Turbaned street merchants can be found trying to follow the Sunna in Brooklyn, and the Acacia wood tooth-cleaning stick so beloved to the Prophet is sold in Manhattan and Los Angeles, where it is called a "Sunna-Stick."

The Prophet Muhammad's prayers have opened sessions of the U.S. Senate, and two U.S. presidents started Ramadan meals in the White House with dates in emulation of the Prophet's Sunna in breaking the fast. Motivated by the example of the Prophet, large numbers of Muslims have collected charity from their communities for the victims of natural disasters and have volunteered to help refugees in the United States and elsewhere.

The American historian Michael Hart considered the Prophet Muhammad the single most influential human being ever to have lived, a claim that seems justified when one considers that a fifth of the world's population is Muslim and that most Muslims attempt to emulate the Prophet's behavior in some aspects of their lives.[30] Every morning, millions of Muslims around the world wake up reciting a prayer that the Prophet Muhammad recited: "Glory be to the One who has given me life again after taking my conscious life from me in sleep, and to God we return."[31] Muslims say this prayer because of their desire to follow the Sunna. For the same reason, Muslims say the *Basmalla* before eating a meal and the *Hamdalla* (*al-hamdulillah,* "Praise be to God") when they have finished eating. They do this to follow the Sunna. Muslims say the *Basmalla* when they start their cars, emulating the Prophet's actions when he rode his camel or his horse. They greet their fellow Muslims with the words, *As-Salamu 'Alaykum* ("Peace be upon you"), in emulation of the Prophet. Many Muslim men grow beards as the Prophet did, and women cover their heads in reverence for the Prophet's teachings. Muslims

visit the sick because they recall the virtue the Prophet described for doing so. They inculcate the modesty he exemplified and show great deference to their mothers and fathers because the Prophet enjoined it.

Muslims practice the Sunna in many aspects of their daily lives, desiring to be raised up in the Hereafter in the company of the one they try so hard to emulate in their earthly lives. By this means, they hope to receive, from the Prophet's noble hands, the promised drink from his basin of eternal life, after which, the Prophet promised, "They will never thirst again."[32]

NOTES

1. Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 37.
2. Malik ibn Anas,*Muwatta' al-Imam Malik,* edited and annotated by Ahmad Ratib 'Armush (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is li al-tiba'ah wa al-nashr wa al-tawzi', 1971), hadith numbers 1619 and 648.
3. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence,* 37.
4. Majid Khadduri, ed. and trans., *Al-Shafi'i's Risala: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence,* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987), 109–110.
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11

Vision of the Shariat

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

At the Prophet's Mosque in Medina I had a vision of the *Shariat* (sacred law) of Islam as a giant, spectacular many-faceted chandelier of hundreds of prisms or lenses, a kind of glittering dome of raw starlight that fits down perfectly over the *Haqiqat* (sacred truth), so that its light shines out from each lens, perfectly focused, a lens or cluster of lenses beaming the light for every aspect of our lives.

One can approach the *Haqiqat* without it, and in some cases get it right, but with the Prophet's *Shariat* from Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, both the light of the *Haqiqat* can shine out clearly and one can approach the *Haqiqat* from outside with clear precision.

The lenses are such things as how to do the prayer, the proper way to contract a marriage, the laws of inheritance, etc., all the details of our lives down to things as mundane as cleaning our teeth, as well as preparing us for the rapturous experience of face-to-face meeting with Allah with correct spiritual courtesy at the highest station, thus making us well-guided human devotees of The Divine Reality.

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Timewarp*. Reprinted here from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

12

THE *SHARI'A:* LAW AS THE WAY OF GOD

Mohammad Hashim Kamali

SHARI'A AND *FIQH*

Islamic law originates in two major sources: divine revelation (*wahy*) and human reason (*'aql*). This dual identity of Islamic law is reflected in the expressions, *Shari'a* and *fiqh.* The former bears a strong affinity with the revelation, whereas the latter is mainly the product of human reason. *Shari'a* literally means, "the path to the watering place," the road that the believer has to tread in order to obtain guidance. *Fiqh* means human understanding and knowledge. The Shari'a provides general directives, whereas detailed solutions to particular and unprecedented issues are explored by *fiqh.* Since the Shari'a is contained in the Qur'an, the revelation of God, and the Sunna, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, it has a close affinity with the dogma of Islam. *Fiqh,* however, is a rational endeavor and is largely a product of speculative reasoning, which does not command the same authority as the Shari'a.

To say, as some Muslim fundamentalists do, that the Shari'a is "contained" in the Qur'an and the Sunna would preclude the scholastic legacy of *fiqh* and its vast literature from the purview of the Shari'a, especially the parts that do not have a clear origin in the Qur'an. From a legal point of view, the core of the Shari'a is contained in the relatively small number of clear injunctions of the Qur'an and the Sunna, known as *nusus* (pl. of *nass*). Some parts of the Qur'an that consist of historical data and parables, for instance, are not included in the Shari'a. Shari'a is a wider concept than *fiqh,* since it comprises the totality of guidance that God has revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. This guidance pertains to the dogma of Islam, its moral values, and its practical legal rules. Shari'a thus comprises in its scope not only law but also theology and moral teachings. *Fiqh* is a form of positive law that does not include morality and dogma per se. Yet the *ulama,* the scholars of Islam,

have agreed on the primacy of morality and dogma in the determination of basic values. By comparison with the Shari'a, *fiqh* can thus be considered the superstructure of the law and a practical manifestation of commitment to the basic values of Islam.

The Shari'a provides clear rulings on the fundamentals of Islam, its moral values, and its practical duties such as prayers, fasting, legal alms (*Zakat*), the Hajj pilgrimage, and other devotional matters. Its injunctions on the subject of what is lawful (*halal*) or unlawful (*haram*) are on the whole definitive, as are its rulings on certain aspects of civil transactions. However, the Shari'a is generally flexible with regard to most civil transactions, criminal law (with the exception of the prescribed punishments, or *hudud*), government policy and constitution, fiscal policy, taxation, and economic and international affairs. On many of these issues, the Shari'a provides only general guidelines, whereas *fiqh* elaborates Shari'a's guidelines in detail.

Fiqh is defined as knowledge of the practical rules of the Shari'a, which are derived from detailed evidence in the sources. The rules of *fiqh* are thus concerned with the manifest aspects of individual conduct. The practicalities of conduct are evaluated according to a scale of five values: (1) obligatory, (2) recommended, (3) permissible, (4) reprehensible, and (5) forbidden. The definition of *fiqh* also implies that the derivation of rulings from the Qur'an and the Sunna is through direct contact with these sources. The need to utilize the source materials of the Qur'an and the Sunna necessitates knowledge of Arabic and a certain degree of insight and erudition that would preclude the work of a nonspecialist. A jurist (*faqih*) who fulfills these requirements and has the ability to derive the rules of the Shari'a from their sources is a *mujtahid,* one who is qualified to exercise independent reasoning (*ijtihad*).

The rules of *fiqh* occur in two varieties. The first variety consists of rules that are conveyed in a clear text from the Qur'an or the Sunna, such as the essentials of worship, the validity of marriage outside the prohibited degrees of relationships, the rules of inheritance, and so forth. These rules are self-evident and independent of interpretation and *ijtihad*. This part of *fiqh* is simultaneously a part of the Shari'a. The second variety of *fiqh* consists of rules that are formulated through the exercise of *ijtihad* on parts of the Qur'an and the Sunna that are not self-evident. Because of the possibility of error in this exercise, the rules that are derived in this way do not command finality. They are not necessarily part of the Shari'a, and the jurist who has reason to disagree with them may do so without committing a transgression. Only when juristic opinion and *ijtihad* are supported by a widespread consensus (*ijma'*) does such a finding acquire the binding force of a ruling, or *hukm,* of the Shari'a.

The subject matter of *fiqh* is divided into the two main categories of devotional matters (*'ibadat*) and civil transactions (*mu'amalat*). The former are usually studied under six main headings: (1) cleanliness, (2) ritual prayer, (3) fasting, (4) the Hajj, (5) Alms Tax (*Zakat*), and (6) *jihad* (holy struggle).

These headings conform to the Five Pillars of Islam, with the addition of jihad. The schools of law do not vary a great deal in their treatment of these subjects. Juristic differences among the schools mostly occur over the category of *mu'amalat*. These are usually studied under seven headings: (1) transactions involving the exchange of values, which include contracts; (2) matrimonial law; (3) equity; (4) trusts; (5) civil litigation; (6) rules pertaining to dispute settlement in courts; and (7) administration of estates. This body of law is generally subsumed under what is known in modern legal parlance as "civil law." Laws pertaining to crimes and penalties, which in the West would be considered "criminal law," are studied under the separate heading of *'uqubat*. Rules concerning state and governmental affairs are studied under the rubric of *al-ahkam al-sultaniyya,* literally, "Sultanic rulings" (also referred to as *siyasa shar'iyya,* "Shari'a-compliant policy"). This is similar to what is known in the West as constitutional law or administrative law. Finally, laws pertaining to international relations, such as war and peace, fall under the category of *'ilm al-siyar,* literally, "the knowledge of procedure." The most detailed exposition of the entire range of classical *fiqh,* including the above categories, is Shams al-Din al-Sarakhsi's (d. 1087 CE) *Kitab al-Mabsut* (The Extensive Book), which contains 30 volumes. A twentieth-century equivalent of this work is Wahba al-Zuhayli, *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu* (Islamic Jurisprudence and Its Proofs) in eight volumes and over 6,000 pages.

SOURCES OF THE SHARI'A

The sources of the Shari'a are of two types: revealed and nonrevealed. The revealed sources are two: the Qur'an, and the teachings and exemplary conduct (*Sunna*) of the Prophet Muhammad. The content of the Sunna includes the Prophet's sayings, acts, and tacit approval of the conduct of his Companions. The nonrevealed sources of the Shari'a are numerous and comprise the products of juristic reasoning (*ijtihad*). This reasoning may take a variety of forms, such as analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), juristic preference (*istihsan*), consideration of public interest (*istislah*), and consensus (*ijma'*).

Qur'an and Sunna

The Qur'an consists, by its own affirmation, of the revealed Word of God recited in Arabic to the Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel (Qur'an 26:193). Much of the Qur'an was revealed in relation to actual events and questions that were encountered by the Prophet. The Prophet also used the Qur'an as the basis of his own teaching and adjudication. Legal rulings occupy only a small portion of the Qur'an. By far the greater part of its 6,235 verses is devoted to religious and moral themes. Such themes

include belief in God, the prophethood of Muhammad, angels and the Hereafter, the human being and the universe, the history of bygone nations, their prophets and scriptures, and even parables. Less than three percent of the text deals with legal matters.

The legal contents of the Qur'an were mainly revealed after the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina, where he established a government. Hence, there was a need for legislation on social and governmental issues. The contents of the Qur'an are not classified according to subject. Its pronouncements on various topics appear in unexpected places and no particular thematic order can be ascertained. This has led many to conclude that the Qur'an is an indivisible whole and that its legal parts should not be read in isolation from its religious and moral teachings. The text is divided into 114 *suras* (chapters) of unequal length, 85 of which were revealed during the twelve and a half years of the Prophet's residence in Mecca and the remainder after his migration to Medina, where he lived for just under 10 years.

Of about 350 legal verses of the Qur'an (*ayat al-ahkam*), 140 relate to dogma and devotional matters, including practical religious duties such as prayer, alms, fasting, the Hajj, and so forth. Seventy verses deal with marriage, divorce, paternity, custody of children, inheritance, and bequests. Rules concerning commercial transactions such as sale, lease, loan, usury, and mortgage constitute the subject of another 70 verses. There are about 30 verses on crimes and penalties, another 30 on justice, equality, rights and duties, and consultation in government affairs, and about 10 on economic matters. Some of the earlier rulings of the Qur'an were abrogated and replaced because of change of circumstances, although the scope of these abrogations and their precise import is a matter of disagreement among scholars.

Muslim scholars are unanimous that the Sunna of the Prophet is a source of the Shari'a and that his rulings on the lawful and unlawful (*halal wa haram*) stand on the same footing as the Qur'an. The words of the Prophet, as the Qur'an declares, are divinely inspired (Qur'an 53:3), and obedience to him is a duty of every Muslim (Qur'an 4:80; 59:7). Thus, the words of the Prophet were normative for those who actually heard them. Subsequent generations of Muslims, who received the words of the Prophet through verbal and written records of narrators (*hadith*), however, needed to ascertain their authenticity before accepting the reports as normative. The claim of authenticity may be definitive (*mutawatir*), relying on numerous sources, recurrent and continuous testimony, or it may consist of solitary reports of odd individuals (*ahad*), which may not be free of doubt. The most definitive type of hadith is verbal *mutawatir,* consisting of the word-for-word transmission of what the Prophet said. These are very rare, comprising no more than 10 hadiths. Another kind of definitive hadith is the conceptual *mutawatir*. In this kind of hadith, the concept is taken from the Prophet but the words are

supplied by the narrator. When the reports of a large number of transmitters of hadith concur in their meaning but differ in wording, this hadith is considered as *mutawatir* in meaning. This latter type of hadith is quite frequent and is found in reference to the acts and sayings of the Prophet that explain the essentials of the faith, rituals of worship, rules that regulate the application of certain punishments, and so forth. Many traditions on the subject of prohibitions, as well as hadith that explain and supplement the injunctions of the Qur'an, are classified under this type of *mutawatir.*

The Sunna of the Prophet relates to the Qur'an in various capacities. It may consist of rules that merely corroborate the Qur'an, it may clarify the ambiguous parts of the Qur'an, or it may qualify and specify general rulings in the Qur'an. These three capacities comprise between them the largest bulk of the Sunna, and Muslim scholars are in agreement that they are supplementary yet integral to the Qur'an. The Sunna may also consist of rulings on which the Qur'an is silent, in which case the Sunna represents an independent source of the Shari'a. This type of Sunna, known as "Founding Sunna" (*sunna mu'assisa*), is the focus of the argument that the Sunna is not only an explanation and supplement to the Qur'an but also an independent source of the Shari'a in its own right.

The Qur'an and the Sunna consist of two types of rulings, definitive (*qat'i*) and speculative (*zanni*). Definitive rulings are injunctions that are self-evident and need no interpretation. There are also instances where the Qur'an lays down a basic rule, which, although definitive, needs to be supplemented by additional information. In such a case, the necessary details are often supplied by the Sunna. Definitive injunctions (that is, the *nusus*) constitute the basis of unity among the various schools of Islamic law and among Muslims generally. This is why the Shari'a is often described as a diversity within a unity; it comprises a unity in essentials but differs in details; it is a unity on matters of belief and on permitted (*halal*) and forbidden (*haram*) actions but is a diversity in matters that fall outside of these categories.

A legal text is speculative (*zanni*) when it is conveyed in a language that leaves room for interpretation. Instances can also be found of a legal text that is definitive in some respects but speculative in others. For example, the Qur'an provides the following injunction: "Forbidden to you (in marriage) are your mothers and your daughters" (Qur'an 4:23). This text is definitive in the basic prohibition that it contains. However, questions may arise as to whether the term "daughters" includes illegitimate daughters and adopted daughters and if so, whether they are entitled to inheritance or not. The scope of interpretation is not just confined to words but also extends to sentences and includes the meaning they may convey in a particular context. Most of the legal content of the Qur'an is speculative with respect to meaning, although the whole of the Qur'an is definitive with respect to its authenticity. Most of the Sunna that has been transmitted down to the present by

means of solitary (*ahad*) reports by single individuals is speculative with respect to authenticity, even if it conveys a clear meaning.

Muslim scholars differ in their approach to interpretation. Most allow allegorical interpretation (*ta'wil*) in addition to more straightforward interpretations of normative texts (*tafsir*) and have validated interpretations based on personal opinion in addition to interpretation founded on valid precedent in their understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunna. The scope of interpretation is enhanced further by the fact that the majority of the Qur'an is devoted to the exposition of general principles. As noted above, of a total of some 350 legal verses in the Qur'an, only a small portion is conveyed in the form of specific provisions, whereas the rest are concerned with basic principles. Many of the general rulings of the Qur'an are made specific by other verses of the Qur'an, by the Sunna, or through the independent reasoning of jurists (*ijtihad*). Since the Qur'an mainly sets forth broad guidelines, its language is often versatile. The noted jurist Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Shatibi (d. 1391 CE) stated: "Every scholar who has resorted to the Qur'an in search of solution to a problem has found in the Qur'an a principle that has provided him with some guidance on the issue."[1]

Shatibi also observed that the specific rulings of the Qur'an are often related to a better understanding of its general principles. For example, the Qur'an proclaims: "God permitted sale and prohibited usury" (Qur'an 2:275). It also proclaims: "God does not intend to impose hardship upon people" (Qur'an 5:6) and counsels the believers to "cooperate in pursuit of good works and piety and cooperate not in hostility and sin" (Qur'an 5:2). Another verse tells the believers to "obey God and obey the Messenger and those who are in charge of affairs" (Qur'an 4:59) and "render trusts to whom that they are due and when you judge among people, judge with justice" (Qur'an 4:58). Such commandments lay down basic values rather than specific rules and procedures. The same is true for the well-known commands to "consult them (the community) in their affairs" (Qur'an 3:159), to not "devour not each other's property in vain, unless it be through lawful trade by your mutual consent" (Qur'an 4:29), "no soul shall be burdened with the burden of another" (Qur'an 6:164), or "God commands justice and the doing of good" (Qur'an 16:90). Each of these verses is concerned with providing basic norms and general principles, which may be related to new developments and be given fresh interpretations in new and unprecedented contexts.

Independent Reasoning and Juristic Opinion

The terms for independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and juristic opinion (*fatwa*) are often used interchangeably. The main difference between the two terms is that *ijtihad* has a greater juridical substance and often requires an explanation

of its reasoning and evidential basis, whereas a *fatwa* most often consists of a verdict or opinion that is given in response to a particular question. It is not necessary for a *fatwa* to provide an explanation of its evidential basis; thus, the text of a *fatwa* may either be very brief or include greater depth and detail. Juristic opinions are often sought by individuals who seek legal advice in the context of litigation. In such cases, the *fatwa* may be cursory and brief. When a *fatwa* addresses complex issues the jurist often feels the need to probe into the source evidence, in which case his finding may be equivalent to *ijtihad*. Neither the result of *ijtihad* nor the finding of a *fatwa* binds the person to whom it is addressed, unless it is issued by a formally constituted court, in which case the decision would carry a binding force. *Ijtihad* may only be carried out by a highly qualified legal scholar (*mujtahid*), whereas a *fatwa* may be issued by a *mujtahid* or by a scholar of lesser knowledge.

Ijtihad literally means ''striving'' or ''exertion.'' It is defined as the total expenditure of effort by a *mujtahid,* in order to infer, with a high degree of probability, the rules of Shari'a from the detailed evidence that is found in the sources. Two important points are to be noted in this definition: (1) *ijtihad* is to be conducted only by a qualified jurist and scholar in Shari'a, namely, the *mujtahid* and (2) *ijtihad* is envisaged as an individual effort wherein the *mujtahid* exerts himself to the best of his ability. In the following pages, we propose a modified definition of *ijtihad* that expands upon the classical notion of the term. What prompts us into proposing a new definition for this term is that the conventional theory of *ijtihad* poses some problems if one were to make *ijtihad* an integral part of the legislative processes in modern times. We thus define *ijtihad* in the modern context as ''a creative and comprehensive intellectual effort by qualified individuals and groups to derive juridical rulings of given issues from the sources of Shari'a in the context of the prevailing circumstances of Muslim society.''[2]

The definition thus proposed incorporates the conventional definition of *ijtihad* but adds emphasis on two points: creative thinking and the prevailing conditions of society. *Ijtihad* is designed to address new and unprecedented issues in the light of available guidelines in the sources. Creative intellectual exertion also means that existing ideas and teachings should not be taken at face value or imitated uncritically. Instead, they are to be scrutinized and their relevance to new issues independently ascertained. Our proposed definition also departs from the view that made *ijtihad* the prerogative only of a classically trained Shari'a scholar. Nowadays, *ijtihad* may be attempted collectively by scholars in Shari'a and other disciplines of vital importance to the community, hence the proviso that *ijtihad* must be comprehensive and inclusive of other viewpoints. Our proposed definition also envisages *ijtihad* as a collective endeavor and thus departs from the individualist and subjective bias of the conventional definition.

Ijtihad is the most important source of the Shari'a next to the Qur'an and the Sunna. The main difference between *ijtihad* and the revealed sources is

that *ijtihad* connotes a continuous process of development, whereas the revelation of the Qur'an and the development of the Sunna discontinued with the death of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him. *Ijtihad* is thus the main instrument for relating the Qur'an and the Sunna to the changing conditions of society.

As a vehicle of renewal and reform, *ijtihad* has always been dominated by its dual concern for continuity and change. *Ijtihad* seeks to maintain the continuity of the fundamentals of Islam while also keeping pace with the realities of social change. These two concerns for continuity and change thus characterize the history of *ijtihad* and the role it has played in the development of Islamic law.

One who undertakes *ijtihad* must be knowledgeable in the fundamentals of jurisprudence, of Hadith and narrators of traditions, of the hermeneutics of the Qur'an (*tafsir*), and of the customs and conditions of society. Knowledge of Arabic is also a requirement for *ijtihad,* and so is the intellectual capacity that enables one to formulate independent judgments. To this we may add knowledge of logic, philosophy, economics, and sociology. A *mujtahid* should also be a person of moral integrity and piety. One who has attained this degree of competence can dissociate himself from the pressure of conformity to the views and wishes of others and be guided by a sense of conviction and dedication to truth.

The first recourse in the quest to find solutions to new issues should be to the Qur'an and then to the Sunna, failing which one should exercise one's own judgment in accordance with one's understanding of the basic principles of Shari'a. This sound approach has received the blessing of the Prophet in the renowned hadith of Mu'adh ibn Jabal. Upon his departure to the Yemen to take up a judicial post, the Prophet asked Mu'adh about the sources on which he would rely in making decisions. In reply, Mu'adh referred first to the Qur'an, then to the Sunna of the Prophet, and finally to his own *ijtihad*.[3]

Until about 1500 CE, Muslim scholars were able to adapt in the face of changing conditions and new advances in knowledge. Unfortunately, as Islamic civilization began to weaken politically and economically in the face of Western advances, Muslims began to adopt a more conservative attitude toward the law to preserve traditional values and institutions. As a result, many scholars became inclined to view innovation and adaptation to change negatively. The scholars (*ulama*) occupied themselves mainly with commentaries, compendia, and marginal notes on the books already written by eminent jurists. They added little new to the knowledge of their ancestors and even served the negative purpose of giving an aura of sanctity to the earlier works.

This was different from what prevailed during the first three centuries of Islam, when open enquiry and direct recourse to the sources of the Shari'a constituted the norm of scholarship. The four schools of Sunni law (sing. *madhhab*) that eventually formed were designed to curb excessive diversity

and conflict in juridical opinions. Eventually, the scholars of these schools saw themselves as instruments of unquestioning imitation (*taqlid*). This view was prompted by the demand of conformity that the legal practitioners of the schools made of their followers.

Colonial domination of Muslim lands also lowered the self-image of Muslims and further encouraged imitation and conservative thinking. *Ijtihad* suffered yet another setback when Western-style statutory legislation became dominant and the *ulama* were left with little visible role to play. After the Second World War, an era of constitutionalism in newly independent Muslim countries marked, in effect, a renewed phase of imitation characterized by the wholesale importation of Western laws and doctrines, a trend that was encouraged both by local elites and their foreign mentors. This was the scenario that eventually gave rise to the Islamic revivalist movement of the post-1960s. Westernization and modernity had clearly not borne the same fruits in the Muslim world as they had in their original homelands in the West.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1898) and his disciples Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) called for a return to original *ijtihad,* which was well received and won wide support in the succeeding decades. *Ijtihad* in modern times tends to differ from what it was in medieval times. Scholars in earlier times were preoccupied with issues such as marriage and divorce, property, inheritance, the Alms Tax, and usury. Society was not prone to rapid change and *ijtihad* could be attempted incrementally, with a high degree of predictability. This is no longer the case. The much accelerated pace of social change and its attendant complexities suggest the need for a multidisciplinary approach to *ijtihad*. It would seem difficult for a jurist now to address matters pertaining to new banking products and international financial transactions without knowledge of modern economics and finance. Technical issues in medicine and science, in labor relations, and so on also generate new demands on the skills of a modern *mujtahid*.[4]

In modern times, *ijtihad* has tended to occur in the following three forms: (1) through the modality of statutory legislation, (2) in the form of *fatwa* by scholars and judges, and (3) through scholarly writings. Examples of legislative *ijtihad* can be found in the modern reforms of family law in many Muslim countries, particularly with reference to polygamy and divorce, which have been made contingent upon a court order and are no longer the unilateral privilege of the husband. The reformist legislation on these subjects is also based on novel interpretations of the relevant portions of the Qur'an. One also notes numerous instances of *ijtihad* in the views and legal opinions (*fatwas*) of prominent scholars and jurists, including Rashid Rida, Abu Zahra (d. 1974), Mahmud Shaltut (d. 1970), and the contemporary jurist of the *al-Jazeera* television network, Yusuf al-Qaradawi.

Whereas the conventional theory of *ijtihad* looks in the direction of legal doctrines such as analogy (*qiyas*), juristic preference (*istihsan*), presumption of continuity (*istishab*), and so forth, there is now the need to pay more attention to the goals and objectives of the Shari'a (*maqasid al-Shari'a*).[5] Muhammad 'Abduh emphasized the importance of custom and actual societal conditions in the conduct of *ijtihad*. The general welfare of the people also demanded a greater role for considerations of public interest (*maslaha*) in contemporary *ijtihad*.[6] 'Abduh's disciple, Rashid Rida, emphasized the need to inform legislation and *ijtihad* of the spirit of the Shari'a and its goals and purposes: "Many people know what is lawful and unlawful but they do not always know why a particular act was declared lawful and another unlawful. If a legal decision and the goal of the Shari'a that it seeks to maintain go hand in hand, it will enhance the prospects of enforcement."[7]

In light of these new developments, the theory of *ijtihad* needs to be revised and reformed along the following lines:

1. To recognize the validity of collective *ijtihad* side by side with that of *ijtihad* by individual scholars.
2. To allow experts in other fields such as science, economics, and medicine to carry out *ijtihad* in their respective fields if they are equipped with adequate knowledge of the source evidence of the Shari'a. They may alternatively sit together with or seek advice from the scholars.
3. *Ijtihad* has often been used as an instrument of difference and disagreement. Although these must remain valid in principle, there is a greater need for unity and consensus. Scholars and learned bodies should not encourage excessive diversity and try to find ways to encourage unity.
4. In the past, *ijtihad* was conceived mainly as a legal concept and methodology. Our contemporary understanding of the source evidence does not specify such a framework for *ijtihad*. Rather, we should think of the original conception of *ijtihad* as a problem-solving formula of wider concern for Muslims. This would confirm our view to broaden the scope of *ijtihad* to other disciplines beyond the framework of *fiqh*.
5. According to a maxim of Islamic jurisprudence, there is no need for *ijtihad* in the presence of a clear text of the Qur'an or Hadith. This maxim should also be revised because of the possibility that the text in question may be given a fresh interpretation in a different context. This by itself may involve *ijtihad*. Hence, *ijtihad* should not be precluded if it can advance a fresh understanding of the text in question.

SCHOOLS OF LAW AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS

A large number of schools and methodologies of Islamic jurisprudence emerged within the first three centuries of Islamic history, but only five have

survived: these are the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools of Sunni Islam, to which may be added the Shiite schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

The Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence was named after the jurist and teacher Abu Hanifa Nu'man ibn Thabit (d. 767 CE). This school of jurisprudence has the largest following of all the surviving schools, owing partly to its official adoption by the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century. It is currently followed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan, and in parts of Yemen, Egypt, and Iran.

Hanafi jurisprudence is distinguished by its rationalistic tendency and to some extent by its theoretical leanings in that it deals not only with actual issues but also with problems that are based on supposition. Abu Hanifa emphasized personal liberty and maintained that neither the community nor the government is entitled to interfere with the liberty of the individual so long as the latter has not violated the law. The Hanafi school thus entitles an adult woman to conclude her own marriage contract even without the consent of her guardian, whereas the other schools require the consent of the guardian to validate her marriage. Abu Hanifa also refused to validate the incarceration of the mentally handicapped or the insolvent debtor on the premise that restricting their freedom is a greater harm than the loss or disadvantage that might otherwise occur. He also held that no one, including a judge, should impose restrictions on an owner's right to the use of personal property, even if it inflicted harm on another person, provided that the harm is not exorbitant.

One of the famous statements of Abu Hanifa, and which represents a major principle of his school, is the following: "When the authenticity of a hadith is established, this establishes my procedure (*madhhab*)." Abu Hanifa also said, "When you are faced with evidence, then speak for it and apply it." Consequently, after Abu Hanifa's death, when his students differed with some of his rulings because of new evidence, they argued that Abu Hanifa himself would have come to the same conclusion, had he known of the new evidence. A ruling of a student of Abu Hanifa that differs from the ruling of the Imam is thus still regarded as a ruling of the Hanafi school. Another important statement of Abu Hanifa is as follows: "No one may issue a verdict on the basis of what we have said unless he establishes the logic of our statement." Although these guidelines were eminently practical, Hanafi scholars of subsequent generations changed them. The early Hanafi interest in original reasoning gave way to a deeply rooted traditionalism. The Hanafi jurist Ibn 'Abidin (d. 1820) stated the new position of the school as follows: "A jurist of a later period may not abandon the rulings of the leading imams and scholars of the school, even if he is able to carry out *ijtihad,* and even if he thinks that he has found stronger evidence. For it would appear that the predecessors have considered [all of] the relevant evidence and have declared their preference."[8] The only exception made was for situations of necessity,

in which the jurist may give a different ruling than that of the "predecessors" of the school.

The Maliki school was founded by Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 CE), who led the Traditionist (*Ahl al-Hadith*) movement in Mecca and Medina and advocated the notion of the "Medina consensus" (*ijma' ahl al-Madina*) as the only authoritative form of consensus. His renowned work *al-Muwatta* (The Straight Path) is the earliest complete work of *fiqh* on record. It relies heavily on Hadith—so much so in fact that many have considered it a work of Hadith rather than a work of *fiqh*. Notwithstanding his leading position in the Traditionist camp, Imam Malik relied extensively on personal opinion (*ra'y*). Two of his important doctrines, public interest (*istislah* or *maslaha*) and blocking the means to mischief (*sadd al-dhara'i*), are rationalistic in their logic and rely mainly on the exercise of personal judgment. Maliki jurisprudence also attempted to forge a closer link with the practicalities of life in Medina and attached a greater weight to social custom. This is borne out by its recognition of the Medina consensus as a source of law and validation. On this basis, for example, Malik allowed the testimony of children in cases of injury between themselves, provided they had not left the scene of the incident. He also held that the wife of a missing person can seek a judicial separation after a waiting period of four years.

Maliki law also recognized judicial divorce on the ground of injurious treatment of the wife by her husband. The majority ruling on this entitles the wife to judicial recompense, whereby the court may punish the offending husband. Maliki law ruled that if the treatment in question amounted to injury, the wife may request the court for a dissolution of the marriage on that basis. Another Maliki contribution in this area is in respect of *khul'*, a type of divorce in which the wife proposes dissolution of her marriage against a financial consideration, usually by returning the dower she received from her husband. Because this type of divorce is recognized by the Qur'an (2:229), it is allowed by all the schools, but in most cases, it can be finalized only with the husband's consent. Maliki law took the matter a step further in favor of the wife by ruling that in the event of irreconcilable differences, the court may finalize a *khul'* divorce, even without the consent of the husband. For this and other reasons, the Maliki law of divorce has been adopted in the reformist legislation of many Muslim countries in the latter part of the twentieth century. Maliki law is currently predominant in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Upper Egypt, Sudan, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820 CE), the founder of the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, was a student of Malik ibn Anas and a leading figure in the Traditionist camp, but later he tried to strike a middle course between the Traditionists and the Rationalists. Shafi'i's impact on the development of the Shari'a is most noticeable in the area of methodology of the sources of law, which is outlined in his pioneering work, the *Risala*. Shafi'i's role in articulating the methodology of jurisprudence has often been

compared to that of Aristotle in logic. He maintained that the Sunna was a logical extension of the Qur'an and vindicated the exclusive authority of the Prophetic Sunna as a source of Shari'a next to the Qur'an. He came close to saying that rejecting the Sunna also amounted to rejecting the Qur'an and that accepting one and rejecting the other was untenable. He took his teacher, Imam Malik, to task for placing undue emphasis on the Medina consensus and the precedent of the Companions at the expense of the Sunna of the Prophet.

Shafi'i takes an intermediate position between the Traditionist stance of the Maliki school and the pragmatism of the Hanafis. He was critical of Imam Malik's validation of public interest and of Abu Hanifa's frequent concession to details at the expense of general principles. Shafi'i's approach to the validity of contracts was almost entirely based on the form rather than the intent of a transaction. He thus overruled enquiry into the motives of parties to a contract or a sale, even in circumstances that might arouse suspicion. Under Shafi'i law, a man is within his rights to buy a sword even if he intends to kill an innocent person with it. A man may likewise buy a sword from someone he saw using it as a murder weapon. Transactions are to be judged by their conformity to the formal rules of law, not by the suspicion that the intent of a transaction is to violate the law. This reliance on the manifest form of contracts and other transactions is not peculiar to Shafi'i, as the Hanafis have also shown the same tendency, but Shafi'i exhibited it more frequently than most.

Shafi'i maintained that a *mujtahid* should not hesitate to change a previous ruling (*fatwa*) if this would make a better contribution to the quest for truth. Thus, he frequently changed his own previous verdicts, and sometimes recorded different rulings on the same issue. For example, if a man deceives a woman he marries by claiming a false family pedigree, he is liable to punishment. Shafi'i has two separate views on this subject, but neither is given preference over the other. The first view entitles the wife to choose to either continue the marriage or separate. The second view rules that the marriage is void. The Shafi'i school is now prevalent in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Lower Egypt, Southern Arabia, and East Africa, and has many followers in Palestine, Jordan, and Syria. Muslim minorities in Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore also follow Shafi'i jurisprudence.

The Hanbali school was created by the followers of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 859 CE), who led the Traditionist movement in Baghdad. This school of jurisprudence marked a reassertion of the high profile of Hadith as source of the Shari'a. Despite the common perception of the Hanbali school as the most restrictive of all the schools, Hanbali jurisprudence is in some respects more liberal than most. This is indicated by its extensive reliance on considerations of public interest (*istislah*). Ibn Hanbal issued a ruling, for example, that permitted compelling the owner of a large house to give shelter to the homeless. He also validated compelling workers and craftsmen who go on

strike in consideration of fair wages so as to avoid inflicting hardship on the public.

Hanbali jurisprudence also takes a more open view of the basic freedom of contract compared to the other schools. The legal schools differ as to whether the norm in contract law is permissibility (to allow certain behaviors) or prohibition (to restrict certain behaviors), or an intermediate position between the two. Most schools of Islamic jurisprudence tend to be restrictive, maintaining that the agreement of two parties creates a contract but that the requirements and consequences of the contract are independently determined by the Shari'a, not by the parties that drew up the contract. In this view, the parties to a contract do not create law but only a specific contract; their stipulations and terms of agreement should therefore be in conformity with the Shari'a. The parties are not at liberty to interpret the terms of a contract in a way that would violate the purpose of contracts under the Shari'a. The Hanbalis maintain, however, that the normative position regarding contracts is permissibility (*ibaha*), which prevails in the absence of a clear prohibition in the Shari'a. They reason that the Qur'an has only laid down the general principles that contracts must be fulfilled (Qur'an 5:1) and be based on mutual consent (Qur'an 4:19). Since God, as Lawgiver, has not specified any requirements other than consent, consent alone is the validating factor that creates binding rights and obligations.

The principle of permissibility under Hanbali law can also form the basis of a unilateral stipulation (*iltizam*). This means that the individual is free to commit oneself to any lawful form of agreement in all situations in which the concept of permissibility applies. Thus, a man may stipulate in a contract of marriage that he will not marry a second woman, even though marrying up to four women is allowed in the Qur'an. Since polygyny is not required but is only permissible under the Shari'a, a man is free to make monogamy the subject of a stipulation. The other schools disagree with this view, reasoning that what is allowed by the Shari'a cannot not be circumvented or nullified through contractual stipulations. Ibn Hanbal ruled that the stipulations of a marriage contract must be strictly enforced. Consequently, when one of the spouses fails to comply with the terms of the marriage agreement, the other is entitled to seek annulment of the contract. Hanbali jurisprudence is predominant in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman, and has followers in Egypt and Syria. The public interest provisions of Hanbali jurisprudence and its stress on the precedent of the Prophet Muhammad have also made it popular among Muslim reformers, particularly in the Arab world.

In Sunni law, the head of state is elected to office, but Shiite law maintains that leadership, *imama,* descends in the household of the Prophet through hereditary succession. Of the numerous Shiite schools, only three have survived to the present day: the Ja'fari school of the Ithna 'Ashari (Twelver) Shiites, the Zaydi school, and the Ismaili school. Shiites differ mainly over the line of succession after the fourth Imam. The Twelver Shiites, the largest of

the three groups, recognize 12 Imams, hence their name, as opposed to the Ismailiyya, who are also called Sab'iyya (Seveners), as they focus on the first seven Imams. According to Twelver dogma, the twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi, the Imam of the Age, who disappeared in 873 CE, will reappear to establish justice on earth.

For the Sunnis, divine revelation, manifested in the Qur'an and the Sunna, ceased with the death of the Prophet Muhammad. For the Shi'a, however, divine inspiration continued to be transmitted after the death of the Prophet, to the line of their recognized Imams. Accordingly, they maintain that in addition to the Qur'an and the Sunna, the pronouncements of their Imams, whom they believe to be infallible, constitute divine inspiration and therefore binding law. The Shi'a, moreover, accept only those traditions whose chain of authority goes back to one of their recognized Imams: they also have their own Hadith collections. Since the Imam is divinely inspired, the Shi'a do not recognize the validity of juridical consensus (*ijma'*) if the Imam is present. Shiite law, which mainly originates in the teaching of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765 CE), is somewhat similar to Shafi'i law but differs from it on certain issues. Temporary marriage (*mut'a*), for example, is valid only in Shiite law. The Shiite law of inheritance is also different from the law of the Sunni schools. Twelver doctrine was officially adopted in Iran under the Safavids in 1501 CE; it still commands the largest following in Iran, and it also has followers in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria.

According to the Ismaili doctrine, the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an and its allegorical interpretation are known only to the Imam, whose knowledge and guidance is indispensable to salvation. The Ismailis are divided into two groups, Nizari and Musta'ali. The Nizaris are centered in India, Pakistan, Central Asia, and Syria, and their leader is the present Aga Khan, 49th Imam in the line of succession. The Musta'ali Ismailis believe that the 21st Imam became hidden. This group resides in southern Arabia and India.

The Zaydi Shi'a follow Zayd ibn 'Ali, the fifth Imam in the order of the Shiite Imams. They endorse the legitimacy of the first three caliphs who preceded the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali (d. 661 CE) on the belief that an acceptable leader has a legitimate title notwithstanding the existence of a superior claimant. Their legal doctrine is the nearest of the Shiite schools to the Sunnis, and they mainly reside in Yemen.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE SHARI'A

This section draws attention to some of the characteristic features of the Shari'a, such as its identity as a religious law, its tendency to balance continuity and change, its support for rationality, and its gradualist approach to social reform. The Shari'a also advocates the moral autonomy of the individual and seeks to balance its individualist and communitarian orientations in the formulation of its laws.

Religious and Moral Aspects

Because Islamic law originates in divine revelation, it is an integral part of the religion. This implies that adherence to its rules is at once a legal and a religious duty for Muslims. The concepts of permissible and prohibited (*halal* and *haram*), for example, are both religious and legal categories and involve duties toward God and fellow human beings. Although the legal and religious aspects of the Shari'a tend to reinforce one another overall, there is an equally significant but often neglected aspect to the Shari'a, which is civil and positive in character. This is the area of command and prohibition (*ahkam*), which guides court decisions and government practices. Judges do not issue judgments on religious considerations alone. A distinction is drawn between the religious and legal aspects of Shari'a obligations. For example, if a debt is not paid by a debtor and then some property of the debtor comes into the creditor's possession, the moral teachings of the religion would entitle the creditor to take the equivalent of what is due to him without the debtor's permission. However, if the matter is brought before a court, the creditor will not be allowed to take anything unless he proves his claim through normal methods. Consider also a case in which the creditor has waived the debt by way of charity to the debtor without actually informing him of this, and later he changes his mind and sues the debtor for his claim. In this case, the creditor is entitled to receive payment judicially because the debt was not officially forgiven. However, on moral grounds the creditor would not be able to make such a claim, since an act of charity, even if it is done in secret, may not be revoked.

This distinction between what is and what is not enforceable in a court of justice can also be seen in the scale of Five Values: obligatory (*wajib*), recommended (*mandub*), permissible (*mubah*), reprehensible (*makruh*), and forbidden (*haram*). Of these Five Values, only the first and the last, the obligatory and the forbidden, are legal categories. The remaining three categories are moral in nature and thus are not actionable in court. A lawfully constituted government is authorized, however, to deem a reprehensible act forbidden and a recommended act obligatory if public interest dictates such.

The same distinction between moral and juridical obligations also characterizes the difference between adjudication (*qada*) and juristic opinion (*fatwa*). The judge (*qadi*) must decide his cases based on apparent evidence, whereas a jurisconsult (*mufti*) investigates both the apparent and the actual positions. Both are reflected in his verdict. In the event of a conflict between the two positions, the *mufti* can base his *fatwa* on religious considerations, whereas the judge must consider objective evidence only. Hence, a pious individual in a court case is not treated differently from a person of questionable piety or of no apparent religion.

This dual approach to rights and duties can also be seen in the different orientations of the legal schools with regard to externality and intent. As already noted, the Shafi'i and Hanafi schools tend to stress the external form of conduct without exploring the intent behind it, whereas the Maliki and Hanbali schools are inclined toward the opposite position. This can be illustrated with reference to the contract of marriage. If a man marries a woman with the sole intention of sexual gratification and then divorces her soon afterward, the marriage is invalid according to the Maliki and Hanbali schools but is lawful according to the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools. All that is necessary according to the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools is that the legal requirements of a valid contract of marriage are fulfilled. The other two schools base their judgment on the underlying intent of the act and maintain that distortions should be rectified whenever they become known.

This difference of attitude can also be seen with regard to legal stratagems (*hiyal fiqhiyya*), such as in the following case: Person A sells a piece of cloth to person B for $100 payable in one year. Then he immediately buys the same cloth for $80 paid on the spot. This is considered disguised usury (*riba*) because it amounts to charging an interest rate of 20 percent for a deferred payment of $100 over one year. This can be seen as circumventing the Shari'a prohibition against usury by violating its intent. The Malikis and Hanbalis reject such stratagems on this basis, but the Hanafis and Shafi'is allow such sales, provided they are not made fraudulently and that they realize a benefit.[9]

The Shari'a also contains provisions on expiations (*kaffara*), which are self-inflicted punishments of a religious character that the courts are not authorized to enforce. For example, when a person breaks a solemn oath, he may expiate it by giving charity sufficient to feed 10 poor persons, or alternatively he may fast for three days. Similar other expiations are provided for in the Qur'an. However, none of them are legally enforceable.

Morality and religion are closely interrelated. The Prophet declared in a hadith, "I have been sent to accomplish the virtues of morality." The moral overtones of the Shari'a are seen in its propensity toward duty and responsibility (*taklif*). This is so much the case that some Western scholars have characterized the Shari'a as a "system of duties" in comparison with statutory law, which often speaks of rights. The facts that the Shari'a proscribes usury, wine drinking, and gambling; proclaims legal alms (*Zakat*) as a duty; and encourages "lowering the gaze" between members of the opposite sex are all reflective of the moral underpinnings of the Shari'a. The moral nature of the Shari'a can also be seen in the rules pertaining to war, in which the Shari'a forbids maiming, injury to children, women, and the elderly, and damage to animals, crops, and buildings. The Prophet and the early Caliphs after him condemned cruelty to animals and took to task those who caused them hardship and abuse. Although infractions such as these are not enforceable in a court of law, in premodern times the market controller (*muhtasib*) was authorized to intervene and stop such practices.

Continuity and Change

It is often said by Muslims that Islamic law is immutable because it is divinely ordained. However, the divine law itself includes a certain amount of adaptability and change in its philosophy and outlook. Some of the basic principles of the Shari'a, such as justice, equality, public interest, consultation, and enjoining the good and forbidding evil, are inherently dynamic and cannot be accurately described as either mutable or immutable. They are immutable in principle and yet remain open to adaptation and adjustment on the level of implementation. The fundamentals of faith and the practical pillars on which it stands, the basic moral values of Islam, and its clear injunctions are on the whole permanent and unchangeable. However, in many other areas the Shari'a provides only general guidelines whose details may be adjusted and modified through the exercise of reasoning and *ijtihad*.

Broadly speaking, the Shari'a is immutable with regard to ends but mutable with regard to means. Moral ends such as promoting human dignity, justice, and equality; the realization of lawful benefits for the people; the prevention of harm; and removal of hardship are among the overriding objectives of the Shari'a. In their broad outlines, these objectives are permanent and unchangeable. However, the means of securing the recognized objectives of the Shari'a are flexible since they are not specified in the sources and thus remain open to considerations of public policy and justice. For example, vindicating the truth is an objective in its own right. Truth may be established by the testimony of upright witnesses or by other means as they become available, such as sound recording, photography, or laboratory analysis, which may be even more reliable than verbal testimony. The Shari'a specifies the objective of upholding the truth but leaves open the means by which the truth is ascertained. One *fiqh* rule that is often criticized in the West is that the testimony of two females is equal to that of one male. Muslim jurists of the medieval era apparently upheld this rule in light of the prevailing conditions of their time. There is a reference in the Qur'an that validates the testimony of men and women in that order. However, the reference does not specifically preclude the testimony of female witnesses in any specified number, with or without male witnesses. Many contemporary Muslim scholars believe that the legal interpretation of the Qur'an should be goal oriented and responsive to the realities of contemporary Muslim society. Thus, if the overriding objectives of truth and justice are better served by admitting the testimony of female witnesses on an equal basis with that of male witnesses—especially when women are the only witnesses available in a particular case—a judge should not hesitate to admit them as witnesses and adjust the rules of *fiqh* to that effect.[10]

Ratiocination (Ta'lil)

As a principle of jurisprudence, ratiocination is a step beyond interpretation (*tafsir* or *ta'wil*), in that the latter is confined to the words and sentences of the text, while ratiocination looks into the rationale and purpose of the text. The rules of the Shari'a are accordingly derived from the proper effective cause or causes (*'illa*) of a ruling in a text, which must be present if the rules are to be implemented. The practice of ratiocination in Islamic jurisprudence takes its origin from the Qur'an. Unlike statutes, textual rulings of the Qur'an often espouse an appeal to the reason and conscience of its audience. On numerous occasions the text explains the rationale, effective cause, intention, purpose, or consequences of its ruling. This aspect of the Qur'an, known as *Ta'lil,* is also supported in the frequent references the text makes to those who think, enquire into the world around them, and draw rational conclusions from their observations.

Ratiocination is also an essential component of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), in that an analogy cannot be constructed without the identification of an effective cause that is common between the original case and the new case. Ratiocination is not valid with regard to devotional matters, but outside of this sphere the Shari'a encourages investigation and enquiry into its logic. Ratiocination in the Qur'an means that the laws of the Qur'an are not imposed for the sake of mere conformity to rules but that they aim at the realization of certain benefits and objectives. When the effective cause, rationale, and objective of an injunction are properly ascertained, these serve as basic indicators of the continued validity of the injunction. Conversely, when a ruling of the Shari'a outside of the sphere of devotional matters no longer serves its original intention and purpose, it is the proper role of the scholar (*mujtahid*) to substitute a suitable alternative for it.

An early instance of ratiocination is noted in the decision of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 643), who suspended the influential former pagans' share in *Zakat* revenues. Although the Qur'an assigned a share of the Zakat Tax for them (Qur'an 9:60), the Caliph discontinued this practice on the argument that "God has exalted Islam and it is no longer in need of their support." The Caliph thus departed, on purely rational grounds, from the letter of the Qur'an in favor of its wider interpretation because of the change of circumstances.

It is also reported that the Prophet's widow 'A'isha reversed the ruling of the hadith that had allowed women to attend mosques for congregational prayers, stating that owing to the spread of moral corruption among the Muslims, the Prophet would have done the same were he alive. Once again, I must add that because of the change of conditions in our own time, the prevailing custom permits women's participation in almost all

occupations. Thus, it would no longer make sense that the mosque should be the only place where women should not be present. The specific cause and argument may vary in each case, but the basic rationales behind the practice of ratiocination are the common good and caution against irrational conformity to rules. In the practice of Islamic jurisprudence, ratiocination is thus indispensable to juridical reasoning. The majority of legal scholars have upheld this practice on the belief that a mechanical reading of the text that is devoid of wisdom and driven only by considerations of conformity should be avoided whenever possible.

Gradualism and Pragmatism

The Shari'a favors a gradual approach to legislation and social reform. This is amply illustrated in the fact that the Qur'an was revealed over a period of 23 years and much of it was revealed in relationship to actual events. As noted earlier, the Meccan portion of the Qur'an was devoted to moral teaching and dogma and contained little legislation. Legislation is almost entirely a phenomenon of the Medina verses. Even in Medina, many of the laws of the Qur'an were revealed in stages. For example, the final ban on wine drinking (Qur'an 5:90) was preceded by two separate declarations, one of which merely referred to the adverse effects of intoxication (Qur'an 2:219). Another verse proscribed drinking during ritual prayer before wine drinking was finally banned altogether (Qur'an 4:43). This manner of legislation can also be seen with respect to the five daily prayers, which were initially fixed at two and were later raised to five. Also, the payment of the Zakat Alms Tax, which was an optional charity to begin with, became obligatory after the Prophet's migration to Medina. Finally, the practice of fasting was also optional at first and was later made into a religious duty. Some of the earlier rulings of the Qur'an were subsequently abrogated and replaced in light of the new circumstances that the nascent community experienced in Medina.[11]

Islamic law favors realistic reform but it is averse to abrupt revolutionary changes. This is conveyed in the advice that the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 720 CE) gave to his ambitious son 'Abd al-Malik, who suggested to his father that God had granted him the power to end corruption in society. The Caliph advised against such a course, saying that Almighty God Himself denounced wine drinking twice before He banned it. "If I take sweeping action even in the right cause and inflict it on people all at once, I fear revolt and the possibility that they may reject [my reforms] all at once." Commenting on this account, the contemporary jurist Yusuf al-Qaradawi wrote, "This is a correct understanding of Islam. The kind of understanding that is implied in the very meaning of *fiqh* and would be unquestionably upheld by it."[12]

The pragmatism of the Shari'a is also manifested in the frequent concessions it makes to those, including the sick, the elderly, pregnant women, and travelers, who face hardship regarding daily prayers and fasting. It also makes provisions for emergencies, in which the rules of Shari'a may be temporarily suspended on grounds of necessity. Thus, according to a legal maxim, the opinion (*fatwa*) of a *mujtahid* must take into consideration changes of time and circumstance. We note, for instance, that people were not allowed in the early days of Islam to charge a fee for teaching the Qur'an, as this was an act of spiritual merit. Later, however, it was noted that people no longer volunteered to teach, and their knowledge of the Qur'an suffered a decline. The jurists consequently issued a verdict that reversed the former position and allowed payment of remuneration for the teaching of Qur'an. Note also the pragmatic verdict of Imam Malik, which permitted the pledging of allegiance (*bay'a*) for the lesser qualified of two candidates for leadership, if this is deemed to be in the public interest. The normal rule requires that allegiance only be given to the most qualified candidate. On a similar note, normal rules require that a judge should be a learned *mujtahid*; however, a person of lesser qualification may be appointed should there be a shortage of qualified persons for judicial posts. The same logic applies to the uprightness of a witness. In the event, however, where the only witness in a case is a person of lesser qualifications, the judge may admit him and adjudicate the case if this is deemed the only reasonable alternative. Thus, the judge, jurist, and ruler are advised not to opt for a more difficult decision in the event where an easier option is justified.

Individualism and Communitarianism

Islamic law requires that government affairs be conducted in consultation with the community and that the government should strive to secure the public interest (*maslaha*). This is the subject of the following legal maxim: "The affairs of the Imam are determined by reference to public interest." According to another legal maxim, instances of conflict between public and private interests must be determined in favor of the public. Public interest is thus the criterion by which the success and failure of government is measured from the perspective of the Shari'a.

Notwithstanding its communitarian orientation, the Shari'a is also inherently individualistic. The individualism of the Shari'a can be seen in the idea that religion is primarily a matter of individual conscience. The individualistic orientation of the Shari'a is manifested in a variety of other ways too, including the fact that the rules of the Shari'a are addressed directly to the *mukallaf,* the legally competent individual. The individualism of the Shari'a was strong enough to persuade the sectarian Kharijites (literally, "Secessionists") and certain groups of Islamic rationalists to embrace the view that forming a

government was not a religious obligation. According to this view, since the Shari'a addressed individuals directly, if every person complied with its rulings, justice would prevail without the need for a government. These and similar other views were expressed on the assumption of a basic harmony between the interests of the individual and those of the community.

From a legal perspective, Islam pursues its social objectives through the reform of the individual. The individual is seen as a morally autonomous agent who plays a distinctive role in shaping the community's sense of direction and purpose. An individual is admittedly required to obey the government (Qur'an 4:59), but he obeys the ruler only on the condition that the ruler obeys the Shari'a. This is reflected in the renowned hadith, "There is no obedience in transgression, obedience is only in righteousness."[13] One can also quote two other traditions that substantiate the moral autonomy of the individual. In one of these traditions, the Prophet instructed believers to "tell the truth even if it be unpleasant." In the other, he declared, "The best form of *jihad* is to tell a word of truth to an oppressive ruler."[14]

The dignity and welfare of the person is of central concern to Islamic law. Scholars have agreed that the Shari'a should uphold five essential goals (*maqasid al-Shari'a*). These are religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage. Each of these goals is premised on the dignity of the person, which must be protected as a matter of priority. Although the basic interests of the community and those of the individual are thought to coincide within the structure of these goals, the main focus is nevertheless on the individual.

The Qur'anic principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*hisba*) is primarily addressed to the individual as well, although it is also a responsibility for the community and for government. The individualism behind this principle can be seen in a hadith that states: "If any of you sees an evil, let him change it by his hand. If he is unable to do that, let him change it by his words. If he is still unable to do that, then let him denounce it in his heart, but this is the weakest form of belief."[15] The ruling conveyed in this hadith is supportive of the moral autonomy of the individual and validates, at least in principle, a citizen's power of arrest. In dealing with this issue, Muslim jurists have concluded that the individual must act with conviction when he believes that the initiative he takes is likely to achieve the desired result. However, he is advised not to act if he is convinced that his intervention, however well intended, might cause a harm equal to or greater than the one he is trying to avert.

A related Qur'anic principle is that of sincere advice (*nasiha*). This principle entitles an individual to advise a fellow citizen, including the head of state and his officials, or rectify an error on his part. The main difference between *hisba* and *nasiha* is that the former is concerned with events that are actually witnessed at the time they occur. *Nasiha* is not confined to the actual moment of direct observation and, as such, is more flexible. The individualistic aspect of the Shari'a is also manifested in the Qur'anic advice to the

believers, "Take care of your own selves. If you are righteous, the misguided will not succeed in trying to lead you astray" (Qur'an 5:105). Although Islam encourages the call to religion (*da'wa*), the Qur'an proclaims, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256). In the context of a mixed marriage, this means that a Muslim husband is required to respect the individuality of his non-Muslim wife; he is therefore not allowed to press her into embracing Islam.

The individualistic aspect of the Shari'a can also be seen in the history of the development of Islamic law. Islamic law is often characterized as a "jurists' law," mainly developed by private jurists who made their contributions as pious individuals rather than as government functionaries and leaders. This aspect of Islamic legal history is also seen as a factor for its stability, in that it was not particularly dependent on government participation and support. Governments came and went but Shari'a remained as the common law of Muslims. Another dimension of this picture was that relations between the government and the ulama were less than amicable since the period of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE). The secularist tendencies of the Umayyad rulers marked the end of the Righteous Caliphate, and the ulama became increasingly critical of this change of direction in the system of government. The ulama also retained their independence by turning to prominent individuals among them, which led eventually to the formation of the schools of law. The ethical principles established by these schools often conflicted with the political goals of Muslim rulers. The immunities against prosecution, for example, which are enjoyed by monarchs and heads of state, state assemblies, and diplomats in other legal systems, are absent in Islamic law. No one can claim immunity for his conduct merely because of social or official status.

Two of the most important principles of Islamic law, personal reasoning (*ijtihad*) and consensus (*ijma'*), were put into practice by the jurists without the participation of the government in power. *Ijtihad* and *ijma'* were the nearest equivalent to parliamentary legislation in premodern Islam. *Ijtihad* was practiced mainly by individual jurists. *Ijma'* is broadly described as the unanimous consensus of the qualified scholars of the Muslim community on a particular issue. As such, *ijma'* can be initiated by individual jurists, who make their ruling binding on the government without the government's participation. The jurist who carries out *ijtihad* also enjoys independence from the government. He is expected to act on the merit of each case in line with the guidelines of Shari'a alone.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (*MAQASID*) OF THE SHARI'A

The Goals of the Shari'a (*maqasid al-Shari'a*) offer a comprehensive reading of the Shari'a that is particularly meaningful to contemporary Islamic jurisprudence. The concept of the Goals of the Shari'a emerged at a later

stage in the history of Islamic jurisprudence and gained prominence only after the methodologies of the schools of jurisprudence lost the ability to stimulate *ijtihad*. The chief exponents of *maqasid al-Shari'a*, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Shatibi (d. 1387 CE), and more recently, Tahir ibn 'Ashur (d. 1973), have emphasized that the jurist must have an adequate understanding of the goals and purposes of Shari'a to avoid errors in *ijtihad*.[16]

The Qur'an expresses its objectives when it characterizes itself as "a guidance and mercy for the believers" (Qur'an 10:75) and when it characterizes the Prophet Muhammad's mission as "a mercy to all of God's creatures" (Qur'an 21:107). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1351 CE) explains that the Shari'a aims to safeguard people's interests in this world and the next: "In its entirety, [the Shari'a] is justice, mercy and wisdom." In order to attain these objectives, the Shari'a focuses on educating the individual to administer justice and realize the benefit (*maslaha*) of the self as well as the community.[17]

Educating the Individual

Islam inspires the individual with faith and teaches the believer to be trustworthy and righteous. It is through reforming the individual that Islam achieves its social goals. Acts of devotion (*'ibadat*) are part of Islam's educational program. The *'ibadat* aim at purifying the mind and heart from corruption, selfishness, and indulgence in material pursuits. This is the declared purpose of the ritual prayer (*Salat*) in the Qur'an: "Surely prayer keeps one away from indecency and evil, and remembrance of God is the greatest (act of devotion)" (Qur'an 29:44). *Salat* involves both mental and physical training. While performing the prayer, the worshiper concentrates with full attention; one is not free to do what one likes or act in any way that would disrupt the continuity of the prayer. There is no turning to the side, no staring, laughing, eating, or drinking while one prays, all of which involve an exercise in self-control. The body must be calm and stable before the phrase "*Allahu akbar*" (God is great) is uttered. The first chapter of the Qur'an, which is recited from memory, reads in part, "We worship only Thee, O God, and beg only Thy help." Here one does not use the word "I" but "we" to show that prayer not only concerns the individual but also the community as a whole.

There is a definite time in which to discharge the obligation of *Salat*. According to most jurists, performing the dawn prayer even a minute after sunrise makes the prayer invalid, and one cannot offer the excuse of being sleepy. The purpose of observing such punctuality is to educate and train the individual. One is also commanded to face the Ka'ba in prayer. Why should Muslims face the Ka'ba when the Qur'an clearly says, "Whichever direction you turn, there is the face of God" (Qur'an 2:115)? Making all

Muslims face in a single direction is a form of social education. Turning to pray in any direction one may wish causes indiscipline and confusion. Imagine the scene if everyone in a mosque faced in different directions! Cleanliness of body and attire and decency in clothing are also required for the *Salat*. In addition, performing *Salat* in congregation nurtures equality and solidarity among worshipers and facilitates social encounters in a peaceful environment. Finally, *Salat* ends with the phrase, "May the peace and blessing of God be on His servants." This is a declaration of goodwill toward one's fellow human beings. These objectives are similarly present in fasting, the Hajj pilgrimage, and the Zakat Tax. All of these practices train the individual in self-discipline, sacrifice, and sensitivity for the well-being of others. The pilgrimage is particularly useful in broadening the individual's outlook beyond the confines of a particular locality and encourages a sense of awareness of the conditions of the Muslims worldwide.

There is a great deal in the Qur'an and the Hadith on the promotion of an Islamic ethic that enjoins the individual to practice God-consciousness (*taqwa*); to be honest; to fulfill promises; to practice pleasant manners, humility, sincerity, and beneficence; to cooperate in good works; to be courageous; and to act in a mature manner. Islamic sources also emphasize avoidance of oppression, lying, perfidy, degrading conduct, arrogance, and hypocrisy. Educating the individual in good values, moral excellence, and the attainment of ethical virtues may thus be characterized as among the cardinal goals and objectives of Islam.

Justice ('Adl)

Whereas the basic objectives of the Shari'a concerning the individual are purification of character and moral excellence, in the social sphere the objective is to establish justice. The Islamic conception of justice is not confined to corrective and regulatory justice alone. It also makes justice a part of the character and personality of the believer.

'Adl, the Arabic word for justice, literally means "to place things where they belong." It seeks to establish equilibrium through the fulfillment of rights and obligations by eliminating disparities and excesses of wealth and power in all areas of life. The Qur'an declares that justice is an overriding objective of religion: "We sent Our Messengers with evidence, the scripture, and the balance so as to establish justice among people" (Qur'an 5:25). The phrase "Our Messengers" is in the plural, which suggests that justice is a goal not only of Islam but also of all revealed religions. The reference to "the balance" (*al-mizan*) next to "the scripture" (*al-Kitab*) in this verse has been understood to mean a form of procedural justice that ensures proper implementation of the ruling in this text. According to another interpretation, it means wisdom and balance as opposed to dry literalism. The Qur'anic

standards of justice are not tainted by considerations of race, nationalism, or religion. The believer is urged to be just at all levels, as the Qur'an states:

> O believers! Stand firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even if it is against yourself, your parents, and relatives and whether it be against rich or poor.
>
> (Qur'an 4:135)

> And let not the hatred of a people divert you from the path of justice. Be just as it is closest to piety.
>
> (Qur'an 5:8)

> And when you speak, speak with justice.
>
> (Qur'an 6:152)

The demand for justice is also paired with the virtue of benevolence (*ihsan*): "Surely God enjoins justice and the practice of benevolence" (Qur'an 16:90). This juxtaposition of the concepts of justice and benevolence opens the field to considerations of equity and fairness, especially where the linguistic confines of a legal text might lead to rigidity and unfair results. Justice should be carried out in the spirit of *ihsan,* even when it is not demanded as such. Muslim legists devised the principle of juristic preference (*istihsan*) in order to find an equitable alternative when the literal reading of a text fails to deliver a just solution.[18] Ibn Qayyim explains that justice must be followed and upheld wherever it is found, whether inside or outside the declared provisions of the law. Because justice is the supreme goal of Islam, God has sent scriptures and Messengers in order to establish justice among people. Whenever there are indications of the proper path to justice, it is in accordance with the law of God to go toward it. Hence, says Ibn Qayyim, "Any path that leads to justice and fairness is an integral part of the religion and can never be against it."[19] Even if a specific ruling cannot be found in the Shari'a to show the direction toward justice in a particular situation, the search for justice should still be attempted, and the result of such effort, if sincerely undertaken, will always be in harmony with the Shari'a.

Muslims are also directed to be just in their relations with non-Muslims: "God forbids you not to be just and benevolent to those who have not fought you over your faith nor have evicted you from your homes. God loves those who are assiduous in doing justice" (Qur'an 60:8). The ruling of this verse extends to all nations and followers of all faiths and includes all of humanity.[20] In quoting this and other Qur'anic injunctions, the Muslim Brotherhood activist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) concludes that justice is an inherent right of all human beings under the Shari'a.[21]

It would thus appear that injustice is abhorrent to the letter and the spirit of the Qur'an. Some rulings of Islamic jurisprudence that were formulated at earlier times and in a different set of circumstances may now be deemed unjust. In my opinion, one's attitude toward such anomalies should be guided by Ibn Qayyim's penetrating assessment that unjust rulings should not be part of the Shari'a even though they are derived through its application. They should thus be revised through *ijtihad* in the light of the broad objectives of Shari'a and the prevailing interest of society.

Consideration of Public Interest (Maslaha)

It is generally held that the Shari'a in all of its parts aims at securing benefits for the people and protecting them against corruption and evil. In his pioneering work, *al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-Shari'a* (Accepted Doctrines on the Foundations of the Shari'a), the jurist Shatibi singled out the consideration of public interest (*maslaha*) as being the only objective of the Shari'a that is broad enough to comprise all measures that are beneficial to human beings, including the administration of justice and rules of worship. In doing this, he put a fresh emphasis on the concept of the Goals of the Shari'a, and his unique contribution to the understanding of this subject is widely acknowledged. Scholars agree that every ruling of the Shari'a serves the public interest: all commandments of the Shari'a are meant to realize *maslaha* and all of its prohibitions are designed to prevent corruption (*mafsada*) in various ways. The designation of actions as obligatory (*wajib*), recommended (*mandub*), and permissible (*mubah*) is meant to promote the public good, while the designation of actions as reprehensible (*makruh*) and forbidden (*haram*) is meant to prevent mischief and immorality. Should there arise a conflict between two injunctions because of the nature of circumstances, priority should be given to that which obtains the greater public good. The rescue of a drowning man, for example, takes priority over the obligatory performance of prayer if a man is found to be drowning at the time of prayer. Because it serves a greater interest, the necessity of saving a person's life trumps the necessity of worshipping God at the proper time.

The Shari'a protects the general interest both in this world and in the next. For example, the individual is urged to engage in beneficial work. Lawful earning, supporting one's family, and the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge are all considered acts of devotion and worship. Conversely, an act of devotion that is attempted as a means of escape from useful work and contribution to society loses much of its spiritual merit.

In order to be valid, the concept of *maslaha* must fulfill three conditions. One condition is that the act in question must be genuinely in the public interest and not just theoretically in the public interest. The Shari'a only protects genuine benefits that are related to safeguarding the essential interests

(*daruriyyat*) of life, faith, intellect, property, and lineage. Any action that secures these values falls within the scope of genuine benefit, whereas anything that violates them is considered corruption.

The second condition of *maslaha* is that it must be general (*kulliyya*) rather than particular (*juz'iyya*) in its promotion of the public interest. *Maslaha* is general when it secures the greatest benefit for the largest number of people. It is particular or partisan if it secures a benefit only for certain individuals or groups. The final condition of *maslaha* is that a ruling in the public interest should not conflict with a clear text of the Qur'an or the Sunna. Because the rulings of the Qur'an and the Sunna are by definition meant for the good of all, an action in the public interest loses its credibility when it conflicts with a clear text of scripture.

Two other objectives of Shari'a that may be mentioned briefly are the removal of hardship (*rafᶜ al-haraj*) and the prevention of harm (*dafᶜ al-darar*). Both of these objectives are integral to the concept of public interest. The Qur'an declares, "God never intends to make religion a means of inflicting hardship" (Qur'an 22:78). It also declares in an affirmative sense, "God intends to put you at ease" (Qur'an 5:6; 4:28). The Prophet Muhammad's wife 'A'isha stated about the Prophet that he always chose the easier of two alternatives, so long as it did not amount to a sin. The prevention of harm is also a cardinal goal of Shari'a and is the subject of a renowned hadith: "Harm (*darar*) may neither be inflicted nor reciprocated."[22] This tradition is supplemented by a number of legal maxims such as, "The prevention of harm takes priority over the attraction of benefit," "Harm must be eliminated," and "A particularized harm may be tolerated if it prevents a generalized harm."

ADAPTATION AND REFORM

The First Five Phases of Fiqh

The initial phase of Islamic jurisprudence was the Prophetic period (c. 610–632 CE). In this period, the Qur'an was revealed and the Prophet Muhammad explained and reinforced it through his own teachings and Sunna. There was a general preoccupation with the Qur'an, and the emphasis was not as much on law as on dogma and morality. The legal rulings of the Qur'an, which were mainly revealed during the second decade of the Prophet's mission, were mainly issue oriented and practical. There was little need for speculative legal reasoning or *ijtihad,* since the Prophet himself provided definitive rulings on issues when they arose.

The second phase, the era of Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (c. 632–661 CE), was one of interpretation and supplementation of the textual subject matter of the Shari'a, and it is in this period that *fiqh* and *ijtihad* find their historical origins. Interpretation of the rulings of the

Qur'an and the Sunna by the Companions is generally considered authoritative, as they were the direct recipients of the Prophet's teachings and were witnesses of the Qur'anic revelation. The Companions were known for their frequent recourse to personal reasoning, and the more prominent among them, especially the first four Caliphs, have left a rich legacy of contributions to the Shari'a.

The third phase of *fiqh* was known as the era of the Successors and coincided with the Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs (r. 661–750 CE). Because of the territorial expansion of the Umayyad state, new issues arose that stimulated significant developments in *fiqh*. This period was marked by the emergence of two schools of legal thought that left a lasting impact on subsequent developments. These were the Traditionists (*Ahl al-Hadith*) and the Rationalists (*Ahl al-Ra'y*). The secession of the Shiites from the main body of Muslims was another major development of this period.

The next two centuries (c. 750–950 CE) are known as the era of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and mark the fourth phase in the history of *fiqh*. This period saw major developments, which were later manifested in the emergence of the leading schools of law, as discussed above.

The last of the five phases of the formative history of *fiqh* began around the mid-fourth century of Islam (c. 950 CE). It was generally a period of institutionalization of the dominant schools of jurisprudence, with emphasis not so much on new developments but on following the existing precedents and practices of these schools (*taqlid*). By far the longest phase of the history of *fiqh,* this period lasted for about nine centuries and witnessed the downfall of the Abbasid and Ottoman empires and the colonial domination of Muslim lands by European powers. The colonial powers propagated their own doctrines and legal codes in almost every area of the law in their dominions. As a result, the practice and development of *fiqh* underwent a sustained period of stagnation, particularly in Sunni Islam.

The Current Phase of Developments in Fiqh

The current phase in the history of *fiqh* began around the turn of the twentieth century. It is marked by a greater emphasis than before on original thinking and *ijtihad*. Following the Second World War and the ensuing period of nationalism and independence, Islamic revivalism in the Muslim world started with a demand by the Muslim masses to revive the Shari'a in the spheres of law and government. There were those who opposed this movement and called for the continuation of colonial ideas and institutions. This latter group argued that the Muslim world did not possess a self-contained Shari'a-based civil code or a constitution to provide a ready recourse for those who wished to revive the *fiqh* tradition.

Many newly independent Arab states introduced constitutions that were based on those in European countries. However, they also offered a partial revival of *fiqh* through the incorporation of clauses that declared Islam the state religion, the Shari‘a as a source of law, and in some cases introduced *fiqh*-based statutory legislation. As the demand for a Shari‘a-based civil code grew stronger, working groups of Shari‘a and modern law experts were formed in Syria and Egypt. ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri (d. 1969), the renowned Egyptian jurist and government minister, featured prominently in these early efforts. Sanhuri's work was marked by his tendency to incorporate salient aspects of Western and Islamic jurisprudence into Islamic revivalist projects.

The new trend toward the critical reexamination of *fiqh* became visible in the 1929 Egyptian Law of Personal Status, which drew not only from the juristic legacy of the four major Sunni schools of *fiqh* but also from the opinions of individual jurists when this was conducive to the public interest. The 1953 Syrian Law of Personal Status took a step further in the same direction and not only relied on the resources of the leading schools but also formulated new rules that had no precedent in existing *fiqh*. The Syrian legislation marked a new beginning for *ijtihad* through statutory legislation, as it departed from the traditional pattern of *fiqh* being the concern of private jurists and legal experts. This new approach to *ijtihad* through legislation was followed in the same decade by similar attempts in Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, and Pakistan, where statutory reforms were introduced in the traditionally Shari‘a-dominated laws of marriage, polygamy, and divorce.

The call for a Shari‘a-based civil code in Muslim countries was accentuated by the growing support for collective *ijtihad*. This movement was characterized by two approaches: (1) recourse to the wider resources of *fiqh* in all of its diversity and (2) direct recourse to the sources of the Shari‘a and its goals and objectives as aids to *ijtihad*. In 1976, Jordan promulgated a comprehensive civil code that replaced the Ottoman *Mejelle* of the previous century, which was based mostly on Hanafi jurisprudence. The Jordanian code is now widely seen as a model for Muslim countries, in that it combines influences from modern thought and from the four Sunni schools of law taken collectively. In the early 1980s, the United Arab Emirates created its own civil code based on the Jordanian model, as did the Republic of Sudan. One of the interesting features of the Jordanian code is that its articles are followed by explanatory notes that indicate the sources from where they were drawn. At the same time, the code reveals the influence of the principles of *fiqh,* such as analogical reasoning, the consideration of public interest, different varieties of *ijtihad*, and the Goals of the Shari‘a. Efforts are now underway to formulate a unified, Shari‘a-based civil code for all the Arab countries.

Notwithstanding their many advantages, the codes discussed above were confined to personal law alone, which isolated the wider legacy of *fiqh* in other areas. These codes also had a restrictive effect in that they confined

judges and legal experts to specific provisions within *fiqh* law and minimized the need to maintain regular contact with the sources of *fiqh* in general. Following a call by the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) for the compilation of a comprehensive encyclopedia of *fiqh,* the University of Damascus began such a project in 1956. The government of Egypt had already started a similar project in 1951, and Kuwait followed Egypt and Syria in 1971. The Kuwait *Encyclopedia of Islamic Law* (*al-Mawsu'a al-Fiqhiyya*) is presently nearing completion after the publication of 45 volumes. Compilations such as this depart from the scholastic tendencies of traditional writings by treating all the major schools of *fiqh* strictly on the merits of their contributions to the reform effort. By their very terms of reference, the encyclopedia projects consolidate rather than reform existing *fiqh* by providing the raw materials of reform.

Collective *ijtihad* continued as the principal method of arriving at consultative decisions through the parallel establishment of international Islamic law academies, which were made up of prominent jurists from various Islamic countries. The first Islamic law academy was the Islamic Research Academy (*Majma' al-Buhuth al-Islami*), which was opened at Al-Azhar University in Egypt in 1961. The Muslim World League (*al-Rabita al-'Alam al-Islami*) subsequently inaugurated its own academy in Mecca and held its first session in 1978. Then the OIC created another academy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which consisted of Islamic law experts from the OIC member countries, and convened its first session in 1984. India and Pakistan also formed Islamic law academies. In addition, a number of international research institutes undertake research on Islamic legal subjects.

The OIC and Muslim World League academies have permanent headquarters and hold periodical meetings that deliberate topical issues. Wide-ranging and important issues including artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, organ transplants, the expropriation of private property for public purposes, issues of concern to marriage and divorce, and Islamic banking and finance have been submitted to these academies. Typically, *fatwas* are issued by the academies on such subjects through the practice of collective *ijtihad.*

Whereas the Islamic law academies mentioned above are nongovernmental organizations, Pakistan gave the process of collective *fiqh* a state mandate by forming an Islamic Ideology Council at the government's initiative. Malaysia's National Fatwa Council is a similar statutory body. The various states of Malaysia also maintain *fatwa* committees that aid the Muftis of each state in their deliberations.

The creation of self-contained Islamic universities also aided the development of new methods of teaching and scholarship. National Shari'a faculties began to address the needs of students at undergraduate and higher levels of competence. Research-oriented scholarship in doctoral programs take into consideration not only the traditional subjects but also new areas such as the

Islamic law of obligations, Islamic constitutional law (*al-fiqh al-dusturi*), Islamic economics, Islamic banking and finance, human rights studies, and so forth. Greater attention is now being paid not only to the methodologies of the traditional schools of Islamic law but also to works outside the established schools.

A more recent development along these lines is the introduction of Shari'a advisory committees in major banks and financial institutions of the Islamic world, which are charged with the task of ensuring compliance with the Shari'a in banking operations. In addition, new *fatwa* collections, sometimes in several volumes, by prominent twentieth-century Muslim jurists and scholars are too numerous to name. Future collections are likely to feature landmark decisions of prominent courts and judges in a number of Muslim countries. For example, in 1967 the Supreme Court of Pakistan verified and expanded the kinds of divorce that can take place at the initiative of the wife. Similarly, in 1999 the Pakistan Federal Shari'a Court decreed the elimination of usury (*riba*) from the banks and financial institutions of Pakistan.

The twentieth century marked a milestone in the history of Islamic legal thought. During this period, the scope of *fiqh* was no longer confined to personal law but was extended to the sphere of public law and government. For the first time in Islamic history, Shari'a and *ijtihad* became part of the agenda of modern parliaments and legislatures in Muslim countries. Given continued public support for the Shari'a and sustained progress in innovative thought and *ijtihad,* the twenty-first century is likely to see more development of the Shari'a not only in civil law and commercial transactions but also in civil litigation, laws of evidence, contracts, and constitutional law. As before, such changes are likely to be gradual and selective. The overall tendency of change will likely be toward the establishment of greater harmony between the Shari'a and statutory legislation.

NOTES

1. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Shatibi, *al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-ahkam,* ed. M. Hasanayn Makhluf (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Salafiyya, 1341/1922-3), Vol. 3, 219.

2. See Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Ilmiah Publishers, 1998), 367; idem, "Issues in the Understanding of *Jihad* and *Ijtihad,*" *Islamic Studies* 41 (2002), 623f; Taha Jabir al-'Alwani, "Ijtihad," *Occasional Papers* (Herndon, Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 4.

3. See for the text of this hadith, Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud,* Kitab al-Aqdiya, Bab Ijtihad al-Ra'y fi'l-Qada' (Book of the Juridical Process, Chapter on Personal *Ijtihad* in Juridical Decisions).

4. See Jamal al-Banna, *Nahwa Fiqh Jadid* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Islami, 1996), 73.

5. See for details on the movement toward a more goal-oriented *ijtihad,* M.H. Kamali, "Issues in the Legal Theory of *Usul* and Prospects for Reform," *Islamic Studies* 40 (2000), 5–23.

6. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 151.

7. Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim* (also known as *Tafsir al-Manar*), 4th edition (Cairo: Matba'a al-Manar, 1373/1953-4), vol. 3, 30.

8. Muhammad Amin ibn 'Abd Al-'Aziz ibn 'Abidin, *Majmu'a rasa'il Ibn 'Abidin* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-turath al-'Arabi, 1980), vol. I, 24.

9. See Shatibi, *al-Muwafaqat,* vol. 2, 385; see also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Alamin,* edited by Muhammad Munir al-Dimashqi (Cairo: Idara al-Tiba'a al-Muniriyya, n.d), vol. III, 92.

10. See for details M.H. Kamali, *Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2002).

11. The Qur'an (11:114) conveys the ruling on the daily prayers, and on Zakat (24:56). However, these verses only provide partial information, which is supplemented by Hadith. The same is true for the rules of fasting in Ramadan; 2:185 conveys the final ruling but the earlier practice is indicated in Hadith. To give all the relevant evidence on these issues would require more detail than is practical in this chapter.

12. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Madkhal li-Dirasat al-Shari'a* (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1990), 131.

13. Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Mukhtasar Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1407/1987), 6th edition, 322, hadith no. 1226.

14. Ibn Maja, *Sunan Ibn Maja,* edited by Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1407/1987), hadith 4011.

15. Albani, *Mukhtasar Sahih Muslim,* 16, hadith 34.

16. See Shatibi, *al-Muwafaqat,* vol. 4, 105 and Muhammad Tahir ibn 'Ashur, *Maqasid al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya* (Tunis: Matba'a al-Istiqama, 1966), 15–16.

17. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in,* vol. 4, 1; see also Muhammad Salam Madkur, *Madkhal al-Fiqh al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Qawmiyya li'l-Tiba'a wa'l-Nashr, 1384/1964), 85–86.

18. See for details, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Equity and Fairness in Islam* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2005), 112. This book is a study of equity and *istihsan.*

19. Ibn Qayyim, *Hukmiyya fi al-siyasa al-shar'iyya* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-'Arabiyya, 1380/1961), 16.

20. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1400/1980), vol. 28, 43.

21. Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1397/1977), 5th edition, vol. 2, 689.

22. Ibn Maja, *Sunan Ibn Maja,* hadith 2340.

13

A Man on the Road to God

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

I met a man on the road to God with the intense face of an owl—
A closeness of diamond-white feathers in the perfect space of an owl

Eyes of divine penetration burn all the way through to our souls
And ignite us in a blaze of love— the secret grace of an owl

Now, the owl is not revered universally as being spiritually wise –
In some places *"owl"* means *"stupid"*—what abject disgrace for an owl!

I was walking in the woodsy hills above Bolinas Bay years ago
And a white owl landed high and stared at me—inspected by an ace of
an owl!

I may be thinking of that owl when I say this man was owl-like to me—
Maybe in Paradise they're the same—interconnected birthplace of the owl

All I know is my heart opened in his gaze on the road to a Beloved
God—
Love flooded and obliterated us both as God's effect in place of an owl

Ameen—in the world-thick woods hearing the *Hu-Hu's*[1] of that voice
so clear—
Feathers still tickle along my pulse-tingling arms—*unexpected embrace
of an owl!*

NOTE

1. The *Hu-Hu* sound of the owl in this poem recalls the Arabic word, *huwa,* "He." In Islam, the ultimate "He" is God.

14

What Is Sunni Islam?

Feisal Abdul Rauf

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is intended as an introduction to Sunni thought and practice for contemporary readers. The reader might be a modern Muslim—Sunni or Shi'a—seeking to better understand Sunni belief and theology, and specifically as it pertains to the development of political thought—what became known as *siyasa shar'iyya* and which today might more accurately be rendered "political science." The reader may be interested in knowing how her ancestors experienced their faith and contended over the issues that birthed the Sunni–Shi'a divide, and the basis on which they forged the term *Sunni* in the first few centuries of Islamic history. The reader would then want to know which of the issues that led to this schism are relevant today and which are impediments that need revisiting in the struggle of Muslims to define themselves as a global *Umma* (community of believers) within a globalized world community.

By contrast, the reader might be a non-Muslim interested in understanding "Sunni Islam" in the contemporary context, hoping that reading this chapter will help to understand what lies behind the current tensions in Iraq between Sunnis, Shi'as, and Kurds (notice the addition of a cultural or ethnic meaning here, with *Sunni* meaning in this case Sunni *Arabs*) and expecting that it will equip one to improve the situation on the ground. Or the reader might hope that in understanding the tension between the Saudis, who are Sunni, and the Iranians, who are Shi'a, one would get a better sense of what American foreign policy vis-à-vis relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran entails.

Given the space constraints of this chapter, I shall limit myself to describing the factors that led to the rise of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a* and the formalized content of their beliefs, bearing in mind that the typical

twenty-first-century Sunni Muslim may neither personally be aware of many of these issues nor find them relevant to her worldview.

We will see, in fact, that the division between Sunnis and Shi'as, as it developed in the first three Muslim centuries, was driven by political struggles, even though it is often described as a difference in theology. Over the course of the centuries, both the political and the theological views of the opposing factions continued to develop and change, so that today the divide between Sunnis and Shi'as is less a divide in theology, jurisprudence, or even political thought than one of hardened sociological identities independent of their original features. That is, today, Sunnis and Shi'as do not necessarily hold the same set of beliefs or theologies that they held in the first generations nor are they divided by them. Modern Sunnis and Shi'as overlap in their convictions on nearly every position in the spectrum of theology, political thought, and law.

The reader should bear in mind that some key terms that Muslims now use to describe their faith were unfamiliar to the Prophet's contemporaries and his immediate successors. The vast majority of modern Sunnis, in fact, are unaware that the phrase *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a* did not exist during the time of the Prophet Muhammad or in the era just after him (the seventh century CE). What is more, even the core term *Sunna* took almost three centuries to acquire the signification that it carries today. Most contemporary Muslims are also not aware that the term evolved out of a fierce debate common to many faith traditions, that is, how to maintain the core principles of the religion across different generations and contexts of time and culture. In the process, Muslims came to define the boundaries between what was deemed orthodox and what was heretical in the many opinions that were evolving among the new religion's adherents.

The word *Sunni* comes from the Arabic word *sunna,* meaning "way," "tradition," or "custom." In English, the term "Sunni Islam" refers to the larger of two groups of Muslims: the Sunnis, who represent approximately 85 percent of the global Muslim population, and the Shi'a, who represent most of the remaining 15 percent. However, it is important to note that in Arabic, the terms "Sunni Islam" and "Shiite Islam" do not really exist. Classical Muslim thinkers rather speak of *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a,* "The *People* of Tradition and the Community of Believers"—those called in English "the Sunnis"—and *Ahl al-Shi'a,* "The people of the Faction" of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, the fourth Caliph. The word *Sunni,* for Arabic speakers, most properly refers to a community of people, not to a type of religion. This distinction is important because the term "Sunni Islam"—an English construction—suggests meanings not present in the Arabic. To English speakers, it refers to beliefs and practices of Sunnis that are both religious and nonreligious and further suggests that these practices originate in religious belief. However, for Muslims the term *Sunni,* as a term of identity, often refers to the history and politics of the Sunnis—aspects that may have little or nothing

to do with religious beliefs per se but which, as we will see in this chapter, shaped the nuances of Islamic thought that became associated with the Sunnis.

BIRTH OF THE SUNNI–SHI'A DIVIDE

The first challenge that faced the nascent Muslim community after the Prophet's death in the year 632 CE was how to select a new leader, given that no one could truly and completely replace the Prophet. The Prophet's followers, during his lifetime, had experienced his leadership as an organic whole: legislative, executive, and judicial functions, along with the primary and defining Prophetic role of a spiritual teacher and instructor, gathered into the one individuated person of the Prophet Muhammad. However, after his death, the community was faced with the challenge of maintaining the quality of spiritual and moral life that people experienced with the Prophet in the absence of his physical presence.

The Sunni–Shi'a divide grew out of two distinct views of what qualifications the leader of the community should have. Those who became known as Shi'a maintained the vision of the political leader discharging the roles of religious and spiritual leader, lawgiver, and supreme judge. Those who became known as Sunnis accepted the great difficulty in finding a single human being who was qualified—let alone skilled—in all leadership areas as was the Prophet. Thus, in Sunni circles these roles became firmly separated. By the end of the first three centuries of Islamic history, Sunnis accepted the *Caliphs* (literally, "successors" of the Prophet) as those who wielded just political authority. The role and title of *Imam,* religious leader, devolved upon the greatest theologians and scholars, especially the founders of the Sunni schools of law. Those who exercised legal authority as the interpreters of divine law became jurisconsults (*muftis*) and legal scholars (*faqihs*), who issued legal judgments, or judges (*qadis*). Leaders having purely spiritual authority became known as masters (*shaykhs*) of the spiritual "way" (*tariqa*) known as *tasawwuf* (Sufism). Each specialty developed its own body of study, knowledge, and expertise, with each affecting the development of the others.

Eventually, the group consisting of those who thought the political leader of the community should be required to fulfill political functions only and not presume religious, spiritual, theological, and legal qualifications began calling themselves the "People of the Tradition and the Community," *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a*. This naming move was a political one, designed to fix this group's views firmly at the center of tradition or societal precedent (that is, the *Sunna* of the community). In fact, Sunnis were no more traditional or orthodox than were Shiites; the meanings of tradition and orthodoxy in the area of political thought, the development of theology and law, and spiritual practice were still being worked out. Sunnis simply sought to

establish their position over that of the Shi'a and other groups as the more orthodox one.

The political struggle between those who became Sunnis and those who became Shi'as took place so early in Islamic history that it shaped the development of the entire spectrum of Islamic thought, including its political theory, theology (*kalam*), sense of tradition, and understanding of the law. Even so fundamental a matter as which Hadith[1] texts were deemed authentic was shaped by this political struggle, so that even Hadith collections came to be divided along Sunni–Shi'a lines.[2]

One of the major factors contributing to the success of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a is the conflation of its political dominance with a moderating viewpoint developed by its jurists. These jurists held the public interest (*maslaha*) as the highest objective of Islamic law and therefore saw that—outside of a core set of theological beliefs and ritual practices, on which there was universal consensus (*ijma'*)—there was room for disagreement. By recognizing competing interpretations as equally valid and orthodox, they provided more leeway in the nonritual aspects of Islamic thought. Therefore, their moderating position bridged certain political differences that had hitherto divided the community.

The factors precipitating the split between those who came to be called Sunnis and those who became Shi'as may be classified roughly into three categories: (1) political struggles, (2) legal questions (especially regarding the formation of the Hadith), and (3) theological concerns.

POLITICAL STRUGGLES THAT SHAPED THE CONCEPT OF AHL AL-SUNNA WA'L-JAMA'A

The primary factor that shaped the development of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a was politics, as the nascent and growing Muslim community sought to defend its unity and internal peace and support the existing leaders against threats posed by the claims of opposition political movements. Struggles over who the leader should be led to major and bloody schisms between various factions, out of which first evolved the Khariji, Shi'a, and Sunni political parties and then the lesser political divisions within the community.

In the first years after the Prophet Muhammad's death, the community asked: Should the leader be from among the Emigrants (*Muhajirun*), those who emigrated with the Prophet from Mecca, or from the Supporters of the Prophet from Medina (*Ansar*)? While this question became irrelevant within one generation, others persisted: Should the leader be from the Prophet's Arab tribe of Quraysh, and if so, should he be from the clan of Banu Hashim or Banu Umayya? Should the leader be from the Prophet's family or, even more specifically, from the line of his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali? The Shi'a took the latter position. Should the leader be any person

who ruled according to the principles of justice and who abided by the teachings of the Qur'an and its Law? This was the adamant position of the Kharijites. Was the personal morality of the ruler relevant if his rule was competent and just? Were errors of judgment a sin, and if so—whether the sin was a moral one or a political error of judgment—can the leader continue to rule? What is the role of the community in such a case? Did the Prophet himself give any guidance on this? Does the Qur'an give any guidance on this?

These issues deeply split the community. Paradoxically, while the Sunni–Shi'a divide continues today, most of the original issues that created this division neither define nor fuel the contemporary debate.[3] Passionate differences of opinion on these questions led to political divisions, which in turn influenced the rise and crystallization of different schools of theology and law.

By the second half of the reign of the third Caliph, 'Uthman b. 'Affan (r. 644–656 CE), the seeds of political conflict began to sprout. The challenges of administering a growing empire that included Egypt, Syria, Basra, and Kufa (in modern Iraq) compounded 'Uthman's difficulties. His tendency to appoint governors from among his clan opened him to the charge of nepotism, and his inability to rein in some of their excesses bred growing restlessness, especially in the provinces of Egypt and Iraq.

The Official Recension of the Qur'an

Another factor that played a larger political role than is now recognized was a by-product of what was perhaps 'Uthman's most valuable accomplishment: establishing the official recension of the Qur'an. This was prompted by a crisis caused by various factions in different regions that disputed the method of reciting various Qur'anic passages.[4] The governor of Mada'in (near modern Baghdad), Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman, complained to 'Uthman, urging him to take steps to end the disagreement: "O Commander of the Faithful," he said. "Save this community (*Umma*) before they differ about the Book as [happened with their predecessors] the Jews and the Christians."[5] The Syrians contended with the Iraqis, the former following the recitation style of Ubayy ibn Ka'b and the latter that of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, with each party accusing the other of infidelity (*kufr*).[6] Frequently, the recitation of the Holy Book was made the subject of boasting. The people of Hims, for example, boasted that their way of reciting the Qur'an was superior to that of the people of Basra, whose compilation of the Qur'an they acclaimed as the "Heart of Hearts."[7]

Realizing that the unity of the Muslim *Umma* was at stake, 'Uthman decided to unify the community behind a single authorized text of the Qur'an. He asked the Prophet Muhammad's wife Hafsa to send him the manuscript she had in her possession, and he ordered Zayd ibn Thabit,

'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, Sa'id ibn al-'As, and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Harith b. Hisham to make exact copies of the available manuscripts. 'Uthman then sent to every Islamic province one copy of the Qur'an accompanied by a reciter (*qari'*, pl. *qurra'*), ordering that all other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burned.[8] With reference to the language of the text, he gave preference to the dialect of the Quraysh, the Prophet's tribe, over the other dialects whose use the Prophet had sanctioned. The reciters were unhappy with this, for they thought of themselves not as mere reciters of the Qur'an but as keepers of the Holy Word. By specializing in the different dialects of Arabic and forms of Qur'anic recitation, they served as key resources in the understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an. 'Uthman's decision reduced their power and influence. Their dissatisfaction was to play a critical and defining role in the subsequent conflict.

'Ali's Confrontations: "Let the Qur'an Decide between Us"

After 'Uthman's assassination in 656 CE by rebels dissatisfied with their governors in Iraq and Egypt, the fourth Caliph, 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, faced a turbulent *Umma*. A series of confrontations developed that resulted in 'Ali having to wage two internal battles. The first was against a group led by the Prophet's wife 'A'isha and two Companions of the Prophet, Talha and Zubayr, in the Battle of the Camel near Basra in 656 CE.[9] The second battle was against 'Uthman's relative Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, the governor of Syria, at the Battle of Siffin in 657. These conflicts deeply and permanently divided the community along essentially political lines.

During the confrontation between 'Ali and Mu'awiya at Siffin, Mu'awiya's side was losing when Mu'awiya's colleague 'Amr b. al-'As shrewdly advised him to have his soldiers hoist copies of the Qur'an on their lances, suggesting, "Let the Qur'an decide between us." Weary of fighting, and seeing that a cease-fire afforded them the opportunity to reestablish their influence, 'Ali's partisans, which included a number of Qur'an reciters, urged 'Ali to submit to arbitration. They agreed to abide by the Book of God (that is, the Qur'an) and "the just *Sunna* (precedent) that unites, not disperses," as the means of resolving the dispute. While *Sunna* here referred to the approved practice of Muslim leaders in political and administrative matters, we can clearly see in this expression the seeds of the future expression, *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a*.

While awaiting the verdict of the arbitration, certain individuals among 'Ali's supporters protested against recourse to arbitration with the cry, *la hukma illa li-llah,* literally, "No decision but God's." This phrase implied that it was improper to apply to humans for a decision about the leadership of the Muslims. This view was based on a divine ordinance in the Qur'an: "If two parties of the Believers fight with one another, make peace between

them; but if one rebels against the other, then fight against the one that rebels, until they return to obedience to God'' (Qur'an 49:9). In his battle against 'A'isha and her supporters, 'Ali had appealed to this verse, and now the dissidents logically maintained that it was his duty to continue to fight against Mu'awiya, as a similar situation prevailed.

Those who raised the cry of ''No decision but God's'' persuaded other partisans of 'Ali that arbitration was a sin against God, for it substituted a human decision for the divine command—especially the decision of people who were not known for having exemplary spiritual or religious status. In their eyes, it was unthinkable for 'Ali to submit to arbitration. 'Ali was a man of deep piety, renowned for his knowledge of the Qur'an from his lifetime association with the Prophet. To stoop to Mu'awiya's level was simply wrong.

A large group of 'Ali's followers that believed in this position stopped near Kufa and proclaimed their secession from 'Ali. 'Ali visited their camp and reconciled himself to their position. After his return to Kufa, however, he asserted his intention of not infringing the Siffin agreement to arbitrate. This angered the group outside of Kufa. When they learned that 'Ali had sent Abu Musa al-Ash'ari as his negotiator to the arbitration meeting, a group of 3,000 to 4,000 dissidents secretly left Kufa and hundreds more left Basra.[10] The rallying place chosen by these dissidents was Nahrawan, on a canal channeled from the Tigris River.

The result of the arbitration was inconclusive, and 'Ali decided to engage Mu'awiya in battle again. First, however, he felt it was necessary to deal with the insurgency of his former partisans, the Kharijites, so he went to them in Nahrawan. They demanded that he confess himself guilty of an act of impiety (*kufr*). This 'Ali could not possibly do, and he angrily refused. After promising safety to those who changed their minds and supported him—and there were a few who did—he attacked the Kharijites and killed most of them. This eroded 'Ali's base of support, forcing him to return to Kufa and to give up the campaign against Mu'awiya.

The struggle between Mu'awiya's partisans (*shi'at Mu'awiya*) and 'Ali's partisans (*shi'at 'Ali*) continued. In 658 CE Mu'awiya persuaded the Syrians to acknowledge him as Caliph. Three months later, he took Egypt and awarded its governorship to his friend 'Amr ibn al-'As, which eroded 'Ali's control over the territories of Islam. Before 'Ali could move again against Mu'awiya, he was killed in 660 CE by the Kharijite Ibn Muljam in revenge for members of his wife's family who had lost their lives at Nahrawan. 'Ali's son Hasan succeeded him for a short time but then agreed to abdicate for the sake of the community's unity. Mu'awiya entered Iraq in 661 CE. With Egypt and Iraq under his control, the power of Medina as the capital of the Islamic state was effectively broken, and Mu'awiya celebrated the year 661 CE as *sanat al-jama'a,* the ''year of the (unification of the) community.''[11] The elements of the concept of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a were now in place, although not yet commonly in use.

The Kharijites versus the Murji'a: Using Theology to Support Political Power

While 'Ali's battle with Mu'awiya was purely a matter of political and military strategy, the Kharijites became the first Muslim sect to base their movement on uncompromising moral principles. 'Ali's attack upon them led to their reactionary insistence that the community of believers was obliged to depose the Imam who "went off the right path"—their justification for abandoning 'Ali after he accepted arbitration. They declared every believer who was morally and religiously irreproachable to be capable of being raised by the vote of the community to the supreme dignity of the Imamate, "even if he were an Ethiopian slave."[12] The result was that each of the leaders of the Kharijites was recognized by them as *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful). Consequently, the only other leaders besides their own that they recognized as legitimate were Abu Bakr and 'Umar, whom they particularly venerated. As for 'Uthman, he was recognized as legitimate only during the first six years of his reign, and 'Ali was regarded as legitimate only until the Battle of Siffin. Legitimacy to them was therefore not a permanent feature inherent in the leader but rather subject to that leader's correct decisions, a principle that many Sunnis and Shi'as today would find acceptable. The Kharijites therefore staked out a principled position in opposition to both the Shi'at 'Ali and the Shi'at Mu'awiya.

Mu'awiya had been governor of Damascus since the time of 'Umar and shrewdly leveraged his political power in Damascus, expanding it over the entire territory ruled by Islam. By appointing his son Yazid as his successor, he founded the Umayyad dynasty based in Damascus (661–750 CE). In doing so, he revolutionized the concept of the Caliphate, transforming it into a hereditary monarchy instead of its being based on a formula that sought the most qualified person for the task, which was how the majority of the Muslim population thought the Caliph should be nominated. This was also the basis on which the first four Caliphs had been chosen.

Reactions against Mu'awiya's appointment of Yazid were strong. The Shi'a advocated the notion of the *person* who should rule: namely, the Prophet's family, and in particular the family of 'Ali and his descendants. They therefore developed a political theory that rejected the first three Caliphs as having usurped 'Ali's rightful claim to the Caliphate.

Arguments soon swirled around the question of what should be done with a leader deemed to have done wrong, and rating the former Caliphs became a nasty and contentious political debate. The *Murji'a* (literally, "deferrers") wanted to eliminate discord in the Muslim community and thus proposed deferring judgment on this matter to God. They recommended that Muslims abstain from declaring either support for or opposition to the earlier Caliphs. They held that Muslims do not lose the status of believers by committing a single incorrect action; wrongdoers, including Caliphs, instead become

"aberrant believers" and are to be punished or forgiven by God. This doctrine of deferring judgment to God was a stepping-stone toward the later thinking of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a. Abu Hanifa (d. 767 CE), the founder of one of the four major legal schools of Sunni Islam, stressed the idea of the community (*jama'a*) of Muslims and of the Sunna as its unifying principle. For him, following the Sunna meant following the middle road, avoiding extremes, and basing decisions on scriptural proofs.

The Kharijites rejected the Murji'a doctrine of justification by faith without works. This was, after all, the logical extension of their political stance. They pushed their moral strictness to the point of refusing the title of believer to anyone who committed a mortal sin, regarding a wrongdoer as an apostate. While they regarded all non-Kharijite Muslims as apostates, their extreme wing, known as the Azraqis, believed that such a person became an infidel forever. Since an apostate could never reenter the faith, he should be killed along with his wives and children.[13] This branch of the Kharijites was finally eliminated by Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (d. 714 CE), the Umayyad governor of Iraq.

Either directly or by the impetus that they gave to reflecting on questions of faith and morality, the Kharijites accelerated the pace of development of Islamic thought. The Puritanism that characterized Kharijite thought, in its conception of the state and of faith, was located in ethical principles: the Kharijites demanded purity of conscience as an indispensable complement to bodily purity for acts of worship to be valid.

However, the Kharijites had their moderate elements too. Two other branches of Kharijite thought survived in the Ibadiyya and the Sufriyya movements. Both of these groups, unlike the Azraqis, believed that non-Kharijite Muslims were not to be assassinated. The Ibadiyya tried to establish themselves politically, but apart from a few isolated attempts in various parts of the eastern region of the Arabian peninsula and in North Africa, these efforts did not last. Today the Ibadiyya are the only significant group of Kharijites, living mainly in Oman and with small communities in Algeria and Tunisia. As a group, they represent a comparatively moderate school; their present views, in dogma as well as law, have been to some degree influenced by Sunni schools of thought and survive today mainly as a variant of these schools—proving that in the long run moderation outlasts militancy.

THE SUNNA IN THE UNDERSTANDING AND SYSTEMIZATION OF HADITH AND LAW

Before the Prophet Muhammad, the term *Sunna* referred to a way or manner of acting, the approved custom, or norm, what can be loosely called the common law. After the Prophet's time, *Sunna* embraced the total experience that the Prophet's followers in Medina knew and lived as an organic whole, including faith, religious practice, and inner spiritual development within the society's legal, sociological, and politico-economic contexts.

Semantically, the Arabic verb *sanna* means to establish, prescribe, or institutionalize a practice or custom, with the noun *Sunna* being an established act or practice that has the force of social custom or institutional precedent. The Qur'an uses the term *Sunna* and its derivatives 17 times, almost all speaking of God's precedent (*sunnat Allah*) in making an example of the unbelieving communities prior to the time of Muhammad. Notably, the Qur'an never uses the term *Sunna* to refer to Prophetic practice; thus, no Qur'anic basis exists for its later popular usage to refer to the Prophet's example. The closest the Qur'an gets to express the sense of Prophetic *Sunna* is when it describes the Prophet as a "fine exemplar" (*uswa hasana,* 33:21). In several instances, it commands believers to "obey God and obey the Prophet" (Qur'an 3:32 and 4:59, for example).

During the seventh century CE, when the Muslim community was ruled by the "Rightly Guided" Caliphs[14] and then the Umayyads, the term *Sunna* was used in debates on legal and ritual issues to indicate any normative precedent set by exemplars of the past, including the Prophet. During the Prophet's lifetime and thereafter, when faced with problems to solve, people reminded one another of how the Prophet and his closest Companions had acted under similar circumstances. This resulted in transmitted oral narratives (*hadith*) of remembered practices and customs. Such customs were called *Sunan* (the plural of *Sunna*), and a *hadith* was the report of a *Sunna*.

As time went on, people compared their information about normative practices with that of others. Thus, for example, person A would assert that he heard his grandfather say that he heard the Prophet say something about a given matter, while person B would have heard from his uncle a similar or different account of what the Prophet said or did regarding the same matter. These "chains of transmission" (*isnad*) were provided to authenticate the particular transmission of a *Sunna*. Not only were the reports of *Sunan* about what the Prophet did or said, but many were about what the Companions of the Prophet did as well.

Within a generation of the Prophet's death, the Arabian Peninsula, most of North Africa, and the region eastward to Persia came under Muslim rule. Gradually over the next two centuries, increasing numbers of non-Arabs such as Egyptians, Levantines, and Mesopotamians became Muslim. A growing need emerged to adapt the application of Islamic law to societies whose legal and cultural heritage was different from that of the Arab society. Several great intellects sought to develop a coherent and systematic Muslim hermeneutics to deal with legal matters in these contexts. In the process, they founded schools of jurisprudence that were hybrids of prevailing cultural, social, political, and legal environments and influences. They developed the principles and sources of Islamic law and in doing so shaped the direction of Islamic legal thought.

As companions of the Prophet Muhammad or their direct descendants, the inhabitants of Medina naturally regarded their practice as best reflecting the

Prophetic *Sunna*. The followers of Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 CE), the most important jurist in Medina, referred to themselves as *Ahl al-Hadith* (People of the Hadith), or alternately *Ahl al-Sunna* (People of the Tradition). However, at this point, *Sunna* referred only to the overall practice of the people of Medina and did not clearly distinguish between a *Sunna* of the Prophet or the opinion (*ra'y*) of a Companion. Those who rendered their own opinions and those who lived in more cosmopolitan societies like that of Iraq or Egypt and found themselves forced to exercise a greater level of independent judgment and personal opinion on a matter were labeled *Ahl al-Ra'y* (People of Opinion). When their opinion was not clearly based on a *Sunna,* they were disapprovingly called *Ahl al-Bida*ʿ (People of Innovation), suggesting that any idea not based on a *Sunna* was heretical.

The jurist Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafiʿi (d. 820 CE), founder of the school of law that bears his name, argued that the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad had a greater legal value than the *Sunna* of a Companion in the determination of a legal injunction. He therefore gave precedence to the Sunna of the Prophet as the second source of law in his framework of legal interpretation. In this framework, the Sunna of the Prophet stood next in importance only to the Qur'an and stood above the practices of those who came after the Prophet. Shafiʿi's position was that, unlike the position taken by Imam Malik's followers, it was incorrect to presume an identity between the practices of the people of Medina and the Prophetic Sunna. He reinforced his argument that the various local traditions of Medina could not reflect completely and faithfully the practice of the Prophet with a critique of the practice of blindly conforming to an inherited tradition without understanding its basis in Prophetic precedent. This practice is called *taqlid* in Islamic legal terminology.[15] According to Shafiʿi, the Prophetic Sunna should be strictly defined as the sayings, actions, and the tacit acquiescence of the Prophet Muhammad as related in authentic Hadith.[16]

It was also important to a coherent development of jurisprudence to distinguish between legal injunctions derived from specific Qur'anic and Prophetic directives and those derived from the Prophet's cultural context. The Qur'an and the Prophet made specific injunctions on matters that were purely religious (relating to beliefs and worship) as well as on societal matters. These latter issues included laws of personal status such as marriage and child custody; criminal law, laws on murder, theft, or libel; business or contract law; and obligations of believers to follow their leaders, which later developed into the law of nations and governance. Pre-Islamic common law and social practices that were neutral to Qur'anic and Prophetic injunctions, and that may have been incorporated into the practice of the people of Medina, thus were not by definition deemed to be of equal value to the Qur'anic or Prophetic injunctions—even when done by the Prophet himself.

The incorporation of such customary practices led to the recognition of custom (*ʿurf* or *ʿada*) as a legitimate source of law. Custom is subsidiary to

the primary sources (the Qur'an and the Sunna) but deemed to be legal within Islamic law when it does not contradict or conflict with the primary sources. In addition to this distinction, the jurists later distinguished between a *Sunna* that had the value of a legal precedent (*sunna tashri'iyya*) and a *Sunna* that was not meant to set a legal precedent (*sunna ghayr tashri'iyya*).[17]

Since the publication of his treatise on Islamic law (*al-Risala*), Shafi'i's idea of the Sunna as referring exclusively to the practice of the Prophet Muhammad has dominated jurisprudence in Sunni Islam. Today, nearly all Sunni Muslims think of *Sunna* as referring only to the Sunna of the Prophet. Even Shiite Muslims have adopted Shafi'i's concept of the preeminent importance of the Prophetic Sunna in their jurisprudence. The only difference is that they include in their definition of Sunna the collective teachings of the Shiite Imams. In the absence of the Imam of the Time, the contemporary jurisprudent—as stand-in for the Imam—can in fact override the legal judgments (*fatwas*) of his predecessors.

Over time, real differences narrowed between Shi'a and non-Shi'a schools of jurisprudence.[18] Strictly speaking, the use of the term *Sunna* is of a jurisprudential nature, separating the Sunna of the Prophet from the Sunna of the people, in the sense of the common understandings and practices of the people. This created the legal space for varying interpretations of law and normative practices (or *Sunnas*) of different communities, all following the spirit of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunna.[19] Were such a separation not to exist, there would be enormous pressure for all Muslims to abide by a single society's understanding of Sunna as being equal to the Prophetic Sunna. This situation is increasingly visible in contemporary times, when a regional or ethnic interpretation of Islam is often incorrectly deemed the only interpretation consistent with the Prophetic Sunna.[20]

Much of the disagreement among the founders of the schools of law was due to differences in the *sunan* they referred to in establishing their legal opinions. This was because the Hadith collections Muslims now see as authentic had not yet been compiled. Not surprisingly, considering Shafi'i's emphasis on the Prophet's Sunna as a source of precedent, four of the six canonical Hadith collections of Sunni Islam are called *sunan*. The need for such collections was made more acute by the need for jurists to have reliable sources of information on which to base their judgments.[21]

THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED THE CREED OF AHL AL-SUNNA WA'L-JAMA'A

The conflict between 'Ali and Mu'awiya gave rise to political groups that evolved into the three main traditions: Kharijite, Shiite, and Sunni. As noted above, by the beginning of the eighth century CE, theological movements began to accompany these traditions, with each political group developing a

theology to justify its position. At stake were the following issues: What is the status of "believer?" What is faith and how is it determined? What are the conditions for salvation and human responsibility? Parallel considerations concerned the nature of the Qur'an, whether as the Word of God it was created or uncreated, the divine content and attributes of the Word, the nature of the divine attributes and their connection with the divine essence, and the impact of theology upon the understanding of divine unity. These questions fueled the emergence of theology, known as *kalam*, among Muslims.

These theological questions were not purely theoretical. In the political context of the time, such controversial and divisive questions were targeted at judging contemporary leaders of the community and retroactively applying these judgments to the very first Caliphs, as well as to the succeeding Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs. Discussions about the Imamate were not safe activities to engage in, with rulers considering many discussions seditious. However, the need continued to define political correctness while simultaneously defending religious orthodoxy against attacks from nonbelievers of all types.

The expansion of the Islamic state brought Muslims into closer contact with Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and members of other faiths. Greek philosophy and Persian, Egyptian, Indian, and Central Asian practices and beliefs percolated into Islamic thought and practice. As a result, many aspects of these previous traditions became "Islamized," which in practical terms meant bringing pre-Islamic ideas into dialogue with the Qur'an and Hadith.[22] Translations from works of Greek science and philosophy catalyzed the birth of a theological–philosophical vocabulary, the systemization of doctrinal positions, and the rise of schools of theology.

Mu'tazili Rationalism

One influential school of theology that developed was the Mu'tazila, founded in Basra by Wasil b. 'Ata' (d. 748 CE). This school of thought developed from the ninth century CE to the middle of the eleventh century. The Arabic verb *i'tazala* has the sense of "separating oneself, or standing aside," and originally referred to the position of being neither a Kharijite nor a Murji'ite (on the issue of the belief or unbelief of the sinful Muslim) and not taking sides with the Shi'a on the issue of who should be the leader of the community. As a theological movement, the Mu'tazila are most commonly associated with a belief in intellectual rationalism.

Mu'tazili theology was distinguished by the following five theological principles (*al-usul al-khamsa*):

1. *God's unity and uniqueness* (*tawhid*): The Mu'tazila believed in the absolute transcendence of God (*tanzih*), according to the Qur'anic formula, "nothing is of His likeness" (Qur'an 42:11). What they understood by this

was that God can have none of the characteristics of a body as such: He has no form, color, length, breadth, or height. He cannot be said to be either mobile or immobile and He has neither parts nor members. The Mu'tazila rejected all anthropomorphic descriptions or resemblances of God (*tashbih*). The Qur'anic expressions that refer to God's "hand" or "face" are therefore to be understood only figuratively, as referring to His power, blessing, or essence. God the Creator was understood to be a purely spiritual being. For the Mu'tazila, the Qur'anic verse, "Vision captures Him not, while He comprehends all vision; for He is the Subtle, the Aware" (Qur'an 6:103) meant that God cannot be seen, either in this world or in the Hereafter.

2. *God's justice ('adl)*: The Mu'tazila conceived of God's justice as being identical with the human recognition of justice. For the Mu'tazila, God is subject to the same divine justice that applies to humans: what is just or unjust for us—that which our reason tells us to be so—is the same for God. Divine justice means that God only wills or does what is morally good (*hasan*) and He is necessarily exempt from any act that is morally bad. God acts with a purpose, and justice and compassion inhere in the Divine purpose. Existents by their nature contain both good and evil. God can will only the good and is obliged to accomplish that which is best (*al-aslah*). Thus, He neither wills nor commands that which is evil. Humans, as creators of their own acts, act by a contingent power (*qudra*) that God has placed in them. Therefore, they are responsible for their own actions, and when they commit good or evil, God is obliged to reward or punish them accordingly.

God's necessary justice excludes any notion of predestination. It would be unjust on God's part, said the Mu'tazila, to decide in advance the fate of every person in the world and to ordain that one will be saved and another damned, without either having merited this fate by his or her actions. It is for humans to decide their future lot, according to whether they choose to believe or not to believe and to obey or disobey the Law. God would be unjust if He were to predetermine faith or unbelief, and that some are "well guided" and others are "astray." The Mu'tazila were adamant in their rejection of the doctrine of predestination. Instead, they affirmed human free will: the absolute ownership by every individual of his or her actions, which could not be attributed to God.

3. *The "promise and the threat" (al-wa'd wa'l-wa'id)*: This principle means that on account of the "threat" uttered in the Qur'an against a Muslim who is guilty of a serious offense, every person who dies without repenting will suffer the torments of Hell for eternity. This principle follows from human free will. Thus, human beings as moral agents are fully responsible for their actions and will be held accountable for their ethical behavior. God's decreeing of human destiny is embodied in human choice. The Mu'tazila elaborated a corollary principle of "the names and the decrees" (*al-asma' wa'l-ahkam*), whereby those possessing faith are bound to perform the acts prescribed by faith.

4. *The theory of an "intermediate state" (al-manzil bayn al-manzilatayn)*: This principle holds that a sinful Muslim cannot be classified either as a believer (*mu'min*) or as an unbeliever (*kafir*) but belongs to a separate category, that of the malefactor (*fasiq*). Such a person has failed to perform the "witness of the limbs," that is, the ritual obligations of Islam, but his faith (*iman*) in God keeps him within the community.

5. *Commanding the good and forbidding evil (al-amr bi-'l- ma'ruf wa an-nahy 'an al-munkar)*: According to the Mu'tazila, this obligation is laid upon every believer in accordance with numerous verses in the Qur'an (3:104, 3:110; 7:157; 9:71, and so on). This principle allows ethically committed believers to intervene in public affairs, uphold the law, and oppose impiety, both individually and collectively.

These five principles had profound political ramifications. The Umayyads, who—except for Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz—were generally disliked for having forced a monarchy on the *Umma*, used the notion of predestination to justify their rule. Thus, they considered the doctrine of free will dangerous and subversive to their interests. They held power, they argued, because it was God's will, and therefore the *Umma* should accept them. In the long run, advancing the principle of free will ran against the political interests of both the Umayyad and the later Abbasid Caliphs, who generally sought to encourage a fatalistic attitude among the *Umma* and who were arguably responsible for strengthening Muslims' belief in destiny (*qada* and *qadar*). The third and fourth principles of the Mu'tazila were applied not only to believers in general but also used to judge contemporary and previous Caliphs. The fifth principle posited the need for including religious values in the public debate on how to build an Islamic society. Since the primary responsibility for society fell on the ruler, this principle raised the thorny question of what the public's duty was when the ruler fell short of his obligations.

The fifth principle of enjoining good and prohibiting evil was often interpreted to mean active intervention in public affairs to uphold the law and oppose impiety. The pro-Mu'tazila Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833 CE) used this principle to put into motion an inquisition to enforce his belief that the Qur'an was created. Judges were dismissed from their position and even witnesses were regarded as unacceptable unless they publicly acknowledged that the Qur'an was created. Al-Ma'mun, himself a scholar who excelled in jurisprudence, argued that those who asserted the "uncreatedness" of the Qur'an were guilty of equating God with the Qur'an. By claiming that the Qur'an was eternal and primordial, they suggested that God did not create, originate, or produce it. They "were therefore like the Christians, who claim that Jesus was not created because he is the Word of God."[23] In Ma'mun's eyes, this was an Islamization of the Christian belief that Jesus Christ was coeternal with God, and he feared that Muslims might deify the Qur'an. After all, the Qur'an confirmed the Christian belief that Jesus was

God's word, yet it also asserted that God created Jesus (Qur'an 3:45; 4:171). This Qur'anic evidence supported the notion that God's speech was indeed created, and therefore the Qur'an was created too. Al-Ma'mun died only four months after instituting his inquisition, which continued for some 15 years, till the time of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861 CE).

The Response of Ibn Hanbal

The most famous person to stand up against al-Ma'mun was Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE). An original and noted jurist and founder of the Hanbali school of law that bears his name, he was also a well-known Traditionist and Hadith scholar. He was the compiler of the *Musnad,* one of the largest and most important collections of Sunni Hadith. He was flogged and imprisoned for his rejection of al-Ma'mun's position on the created Qur'an, a stand that gained him enormous popularity among the masses.

Ibn Hanbal's later reputation was made possible by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil's decision to end the inquisition and restore the Sunni judges to their former positions. This move helped to insert Ibn Hanbal's views into the future development of Sunni thought. By this time the leading figures of the era of persecution were no longer on the scene and Ibn Hanbal's scholarship and popularity opened the way to an association between him and the Caliph, whose acceptance cemented his legacy as a celebrated Traditionist and as the most faithful defender of Sunni orthodoxy of his time.

The principal consequence of the failure of al-Ma'mun's inquisition was that it brought to a decisive end any notion of a Caliphal role in shaping Islamic thought. In addition, the restoration of the Sunni position permitted the development of what in due course would become recognizable as Sunni Islam. Although important scholars continued to belong to the Mu'tazila, their movement never again attained political hegemony. It was now the Sunni scholars (*ulama*), rather than the Caliphs, who saw themselves as the "heirs of the Prophets" (*waratha' al-anbiya'*). Henceforward, it would be these same scholars, who, armed with their newly won spiritual authority, would maintain a careful distance from the holders of political office and elaborate the system of classical Islamic thought.[24]

Ibn Hanbal's genius lay in his developing a worldview that, in the face of grave disagreements within the community, gave something to each side and put behind the Sunni community the divisive issues that had hitherto created contentions within the Muslim *Umma*. In the area of law, he accepted the decisions of the most important representatives of the generations that followed the Prophet's Companions (*al-Tabi'un*). In his doctrine, he accepted the consensus of the community when it was founded on the Qur'an and the Sunna or when it expressed a general truth on which the Qur'an and the Sunna were silent. His background as a Hadith scholar is

visible in this position, which leans toward the Maliki and Shafi'i notion of placing more emphasis on tradition rather than the Hanafi position, which relied more on the application of reason.

Politically, Ibn Hanbal incorporated the Murji'ite aspiration of reconciling opposing radical political positions by resolving the issues that had split the community. It was now two centuries since the Prophet had died, and expressing hostility to his successors and to historical personalities who were long dead only furthered social conflict. Ibn Hanbal resolved this issue by creating a hierarchy of preference of Companions of the Prophet. Abu Bakr was at the top of the hierarchy, followed by 'Umar, then the six electors appointed by 'Umar (these included 'Uthman and 'Ali, along with Talha and Zubayr), then the fighters with the Prophet at the battle of Badr, and finally the Emigrants from Mecca (*Muhajirun*) and the Helpers from Medina (*Ansar*).[25] By doing this, Ibn Hanbal established the subsequent Sunni position of doctrinally acknowledging 'Ali's eminent position in Islam and the legitimacy of his Caliphate and rehabilitating those who fought against 'Ali: Talha, Zubayr, and Mu'awiya.

In many respects, Ibn Hanbal's political views sought to answer challenges posed by Kharijite and Shiite objections to Sunni Islam. Like the Shiites and Umayyads, but against the Kharijites, he affirmed the legitimacy of the Caliphate as being based on the Caliph's membership in the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh: "No person has any claim to contest this right with them, or to rebel against them, or to recognize any others until the Day of Resurrection."[26] Like the Shiites and Umayyads, he defended the Caliph's right to designate his successor.[27] However, like the Kharijites, he added the caveat that for such a designation to be effective, the Imam (leader or Caliph) had to publicly swear fidelity to the Word of God, thus establishing the principle of the rule of law above the rule of the Imam.[28] Within the framework of the prescriptions of the Qur'an and the Sunna, he gave the Imam wide latitude to take measures deemed necessary to improve the material and moral conditions of the Muslim community for the common good and public interest. This affirmed the social justice provision that was so important to the Shiite conception of the Imamate.

In opposition to the Kharijite position, he felt that all members of the community owed obedience to a legally constituted Imam and could not refuse obedience by disputing the Imam's moral qualities. Striving in the cause of Islam (*jihad*) should be pursued under all Imams, whether good men or sinners; the injustice of the tyrant or the justice of the just mattered less. As long as the Friday prayer, the pilgrimage, and the two feasts (*'Id al-Fitr* and *'Id al-Adha*) are maintained by the holder of authority, Muslims have to accept his rule and pay him the Zakat and land taxes, whether he puts them to right use or not.[29]

Ibn Hanbal's position of accommodation to state power may strike the reader used to democratic government as unusual, and it is opposed by many

contemporary Muslims, both Sunnis and Shiites. However, Ibn Hanbal, like many Muslim jurists, felt that the danger posed by civil unrest (*fitna*) was greater than the danger of an unjust ruler. Modern political science notion of "failed states" largely supports this view. If a ruler seeks to impose a ruling in disobedience to God's Word in the Qur'an, obedience to the ruling may be refused but without calling for an armed revolt. A revolt cannot be justified as long as the Imam maintains the regular observance of the Islamic prayer. However, within these severely limited constraints, Ibn Hanbal agreed that every member of the Muslim community had the duty, according to a person's knowledge and means, of commanding good and prohibiting evil, thereby incorporating a major principle of both Kharijite and Mu'tazilite ethics.

By establishing these guidelines, Ibn Hanbal separated the purely religious commandments of worship from worldly civil matters in Islamic law and gave the ruler wide latitude in the civil areas of the law as long as he honored the religious aspects. Judgment of the ruler's actions on civil matters now fell under the purview of the jurists (*fuqaha'*), who by their position and offices were given the role of maintaining the Sunna. While remaining within the limits of political loyalty, they were to keep public opinion vigilant and impose on the ruler respect for the prescriptions of religion. While for Ibn Hanbal's critics this served to consolidate the temporal ruling power of the Abbasid Caliphs, in his eyes it limited their power and served to keep them away from meddling in issues of theology and jurisprudence. This was a sore point for Ibn Hanbal because he had suffered torture under the pro-Mu'tazilite inquisition instituted by the Abbasid Caliphs.

Ibn Hanbal's ideas paved the way for the rise of political theory (*siyasa shar'iyya*) as a branch of Islamic jurisprudence. Sunni doctrine as shaped by Ibn Hanbal and those who succeeded him drew a sharp distinction between the "Rightly Guided" (*Rashidun*) Caliphs and the later Caliphate, which they admitted had devolved to a monarchy (*mulk*) and consisted of unjust Caliphs. Only the *Rashidun* were deemed to have fulfilled the conditions of the true Imamate; that is, only they had the proper spiritual, religious, and judicial qualifications for just rule. Therefore, only their legal decisions and rulings were binding as *Sunna* on the believers. The legal decisions and rulings of all Caliphs after them were not deemed precedent setting in the same way.

In the interest of social harmony, Ibn Hanbal and his followers developed a minimal set of definitions for the Caliph under their theory of the state. The Imam had to be a Muslim and from the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh. The Imamate of the ruler could be binding without any act of recognition by the Muslim community. Ibn Hanbal even went so far as to affirm the validity of previous Imamates by usurpation (*ghalaba*), thus retroactively affirming the legitimacy of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Muslims must not get involved in civil wars, and they must obey and actively support the established leader, whether just or oppressive, unless that leader violated the

Shari'a in a very narrowly defined sense: the Imamate could be forfeited only through apostasy or by neglecting the duty to provide for the communal prayer.

Ibn Hanbal's view of justice is encapsulated in a formula made famous by the later Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE): "Strictness with regard to religious obligations and tolerance with regard to worldly affairs."[30] This rule is characteristic of Hanbali thought. Nothing is to be regarded as imposing legal obligations but the religious practices that God has explicitly prescribed; conversely, nothing can be lawfully forbidden but the practices that have been prohibited by God in the Qur'an and the Sunna.[31]

After Ibn Hanbal, the concept of Sunni Islam combined the above political and social principles with Shafi'i's view of the Sunna as consisting of the normative practices of the Prophet Muhammad. To Sunnis, all of the above elements, taken together, suggested the parameters of correct belief and practice, and thus of Islamic orthodoxy. After Ibn Hanbal, Shafi'i's doctrine on the qualifications, investiture, and functions of the political leader of the Islamic state reached its climax in the work of Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1058 CE), whose work, *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* (The Rules of Governance), became widely accepted as an authoritative exposition of Sunni political doctrine. This work had a profound impact on other thinkers such as Abu Ya'la al-Farra' (d. 1066 CE), who modified it to accommodate some points of the Hanbali tradition.

Later changes to the Sunni doctrine of the Imamate included the investiture of the Caliph either through appointment (*'ahd*) by his predecessor or by election (*ikhtiyar*). Views on who constituted the electors (*ahl al-ikhtiyar*, literally, "the people who choose"), also known as the "those who loosen and bind" (*ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd*), varied from one elector being sufficient to the generality of the masses as electors. According to the theologian and political theorist Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (d. 1013 CE), "those who loosen and bind" the people to the ruler are primarily the religious and legal scholars, whose role is to uphold justice and the integrity of Islam. In later doctrine, the Imamate could be invalidated through loss of mental or physical fitness, and while the Shafi'is maintained that it could be forfeited through immorality, injustice, or heterodoxy, this doctrine was denied by others, including the Hanbalis and Hanafis. The primary duties of the leader were to guard the faith against heterodoxy, enforce the rule of law, protect peace in the land and defend it against external enemies, receive the legal alms and taxes and distribute them in accordance with the law, and appoint honest and reliable officeholders. The Caliph's duty to implement the rule of law and guarantee the personal security of his subjects trumped issues of his behavior and character.

Sunni thought on the Imamate continued to reflect political reality. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), a noted jurist and theologian who lived under the powerful Saljuq sultanate in Iran (ca. 1038–1137 CE), viewed the

Caliph as the head of the Islamic *Umma*, legitimized by a pledge of allegiance and necessitated by the importance of preserving the legality of the acts of governors and judges throughout the empire. After the fall of the Caliphate to the Mongols in 1258 CE, Sunni thinkers affirmed that the legality of judicial acts could no longer depend on the presence of a leader from the tribe of Quraysh. Considering the exercise of power as essential to the Imamate, they vested its functions in the actual ruler—a position maintained by Sunni thinkers until the present time. The only difference is that modern Sunni attitudes toward leadership have shifted toward focusing on national governments established by consultation (*shura*) and election (a modern interpretation of *bay'a*) as the best way to establish legitimate rule.

Ibn Hanbal was concerned with political unity and confessional solidarity. Opposed to what might encourage disunity, he put forth the concept of consensus as an expression of group cohesion, which was wrapped in an ethical doctrine founded on service to God through faith. In opposition to the Murji'ites, who distinguished between faith and works, he conflated these two aspects of belief, asserting that faith is itself an act: faith is "word, act, intention, and attachment to the Sunna."[32] No one may call himself or herself a believer without making an affirmation of faith in conditional form: "God willing, I am a Muslim." This point was targeted against the Mu'tazilite position that faith is completely determined by the human will. By granting the divine will an active role in determining human faith, Ibn Hanbal also intimated that Muslims cannot condemn another's faith without expressing displeasure with the divine will responsible for it—an unthinkable and absurd position.

Theologically, Ibn Hanbal was against the Kharijite principle of branding dissidents as unbelievers (*takfir*), and he encouraged an attitude of "strict construction" with regard to the interpretation of scriptural texts on this matter. In Ibn Hanbal's opinion, even a Muslim guilty of a grave sin may not be excluded from the community except on the authority of a hadith account, which must be interpreted with restrictive literalism.[33] He cited only three sins that might involve the accusation of unbelief: nonobservance of prayer, consumption of fermented liquors, and the spreading of heresies contrary to the dogmas of Islam, among which he mentioned the *Qadariyya*. This latter term, which refers to believers in the doctrine of free will, included both the Mu'tazilites and the Shi'a. This position remains a source of tension between Hanbali literalists, such as the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, and contemporary Shiites.

SPIRITUALITY IN THE PRACTICE OF THE AHL AL-SUNNA WA'L-JAMA'A

Unlike the Shi'a, who continued to invest their Imam with spiritual leadership, it was evident even before Ibn Hanbal's time that the Sunni Caliphs

could not command spiritual mastery. Ibn Hanbal and the Sunni jurists who succeeded him created the ideational and institutional space to recognize spirituality as a separate field within the evolution of Sunni thought. Although the term "Sufism" (*tasawwuf*) had not yet come into being, he contributed to the rise of a spiritual current within Sunni practice by drawing its essential aspects into his worldview. He regarded faith (*iman*) not as just a simple body of rites but as a system of moral convictions. This included the following elements: an attitude of sincerity brought to the service of God (*ikhlas*), renunciation of the world (*zuhd*), a spirit of poverty (*faqr*), spiritual and moral courage (*futuwwa*), and scrupulousness, which leads one to avoid questionable matters between the well-marked limits of the licit (*halal*) and the illicit (*haram*) in Islamic law. By seeding Sunni thought with such ideas, Ibn Hanbal laid the groundwork for the future rise of Sufism as a pillar of Sunni thought and practice.

Parallel to the theologians and jurists who developed the concept of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a,* Sufi thinkers strove to articulate a coherent model of religious theory and practice stemming from the principles derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna. The discipline thus formed was called *'ilm al-batin,* "internal knowledge," referring to knowledge of the inner self, as opposed to *'ilm al-zahir,* "outer knowledge," which referred to the traditional sciences of Hadith, *kalam* (theology), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Sufis regarded the development of internal knowledge as analogous to the development of outer knowledge, in that both sciences were grounded in the Prophetic Sunna but whose amplification as a discipline developed in the succeeding centuries. Sufis considered internal knowledge as more spiritually fundamental than outer knowledge because it deals with the essential, inner dimension of human faith. However, they recognized the Shari'a and its affiliated disciplines as indispensable for Muslims seeking to lead God-fearing lives. This view reflected the spectrum of the Prophetic Sunna, since the performance of outer duties is part of the fulfillment of inner religious attitudes.

Rendering the internal knowledge "orthodox" and theologically coherent required the grounding of its principles in the normative practice of the Prophet Muhammad. At the same time as the theologians and the jurists developed the principles and structure of Sunni religious thought, the great Sunni scholars of inner knowledge authored treatises that developed the teachings and sayings of the masters of their own tradition.

Noteworthy among this literature is the work of al-Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi (d. 857 CE), who worked in Basra and in Baghdad. His name al-Muhasibi, "He who Takes Himself to Task," alludes to his development of a science of scrupulous moral introspection. This early form of Sufi psychology was based on the practice of certain Companions of the Prophet, who wanted more than just to strive after the outward observance of the religious law and the Prophetic Sunna. Paying attention to what was happening within

their souls through internal experiences, dreams, visions, and altered states of consciousness, they sought to relate these experiences to the "inner Sunna" of the Prophet, and adopted practices that favored this view, especially the Prophet's meditative practices and prayers.

Renunciation of the world or asceticism (*zuhd*) was one approach of some early Sufis. They saw the precedent for this in the Prophet Muhammad's practice of retreating to the cave of Hira' above Mecca for weeks at a time. These practices led to the appearance of the Angel Gabriel and the Revelation of the Qur'an. Renunciation and the performance of meditative practices were therefore analogous methods of connecting the human soul with spirit- or soul-knowledge and precipitating within the seeker's consciousness the individual experience of enlightenment. The rise of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, which brought with them a courtly luxury and materialistic emphasis contrary to the ideals of the original Islamic community, further prompted many God-fearing people to withdraw from the world into meditative retreats.[34]

Devoting themselves to the ardent service of God, these early ascetics not only renounced involvement with the contentious issues of the time but also battled against the worldly seductions emanating from their own egos (*nafs*). They experienced the self as the seat of all evil lusts and as a source of spiritual faults such as egoism, pride, envy, hatred, greed, and ostentatious display. They therefore saw it as their task to look into themselves and exercise self-control, with the aim of transforming the ego and all the self-serving impulses emanating from it. They realized that as long as "self-ness" (granting the ego greater importance than God's Self) dominates, complete submission to God's will is not possible. Obliteration of the personal ego was experienced as an absorption or dissolution of being in God (*fana'*). The road or path (*tariqa,* later a term for the Sufi orders) on which the mystic travels leads to this goal. The early Sufis regarded this road as a journey toward which all of humanity is invited; however, only a special few are able to respond.

In contrast to the egoistic panegyrics and love poetry that were recited at the courts of political power, Sufis substituted the love of God and love of the Prophet. They recognized in the *Burda,* a poem composed by the Prophet's contemporary Ka'b ibn Zubayr in praise of the Prophet, the basis for a literary genre that praises God and the Prophet.[35] Some Sufis gave their poems additional artistic expression by accompanying the lyrics with music and performing them in their gatherings of divine "listening" (*sama'*). God and the Prophet are invariably the two beloveds who are described and celebrated in these poems. The "hearing" of such poems, combined with sessions of invocation and remembrance of God (*dhikr Allah*), precipitates new states of consciousness (*wajd*) in the participant. In the course of the ninth century CE, the word *Sufi* became the term adopted to refer to the one who comes to "know" God in such a way.

An important forerunner of the Sufi tradition in Sunni Islam was Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE). As a young man, he took part in the campaigns of conquest in eastern Iran. Thereafter, he lived in Basra until his death. His fame was based on the sincerity and uprightness of his religious personality, which had already made a deep impression on his contemporaries. He was known above all for his sermons and sayings, in which he not only warned his coreligionists against sin but also commanded them to regulate their personal lives by focusing on eternity, as he did himself. Among his famous sayings are: "Re-polish your hearts (the seat of religious feeling), for they very quickly grow rusty." "Make this world a bridge over which you cross but on which you do not build." In his sermons, Hasan al-Basri constantly warned against worldly attitudes and attachment to earthly possessions. People are already on the way to death, and those who are already dead are only waiting for the others to follow. He regarded the worldly individual as a hypocrite, whose faith sat lightly on him and who sinned without concern.[36] The truly alive person is therefore the spiritually alive and awakened.

The classical period of Sufism was between the ninth and the eleventh centuries CE. This was the era when the great textbooks that gave Sufism its final doctrinal contours appeared. Among these works were Abu Nasr al-Sarraj's (d. 988 CE) *Kitab al-Luma'* (Book of Inspiration), Abu Talib al-Makki's (d. 996 CE) *Qut al-Qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts), and Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi's (d. 990 CE) *al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf* (Introduction to the School of the Sufis). Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE), who in numerous comprehensive writings collected information about the Sufis and Sufism, was also influential, as was Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1074 CE), the author of the well-known book *al-Risala fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf* (The Treatise on the Discipline of Sufism).

Classical Sufi writing reached its peak in the works of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240 CE). Having originally been a theologian, Ghazali converted to Sufism after a crisis in his life. In his main work and magnum opus, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), he recapitulates themes from earlier writers and accomplishes a synthesis of the outer theological sciences and the inner mystical life. His importance to Sunni Islam lay in his popularizing and making accessible to the public the endeavors of his Sufi predecessors and in firmly establishing Sufism within the normative practice of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a*.

The apogee of Sufi intellectual construction occurs in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi. In a tripartite division of "God's people," he places Sufis above the ascetics but below those who realize true knowledge of God (*al-muhaqqiqun*). In this highest category, he includes the Prophet Muhammad and the greatest "friends" of God (*awliya' Allah*), a term we may render in English as "saints." The basic activity of God's friends is realization of the truth (*tahqiq*), which Ibn al-'Arabi understands in terms of the Prophet's command: "Give everything that has a reality (*haqiqa*) its right or claim

(*haqq*)." Everything in existence has a *haqq*—a truth or reality, and therefore has a right and an appropriate claim—or else God would not have created it. The function of the realized Sufi is to discern the *haqq* in any situation and act accordingly. Ibn al-'Arabi proceeds to set out principles by which every *haqq* can be discerned and acted upon. For him, the People of God approach reality on the basis of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Thus, they give each thing its due according to the Shari'a, the Sunna, and the example of the People of God. Like most Sufis, Ibn al-'Arabi insists in his writings that the Shari'a is organically inseparable from the *haqiqa*, the Higher Reality.

TAHAWI AND THE FORMALIZATION OF THE SUNNI CREED

By the ninth century CE, the Sunni creed had become formalized. Perhaps nothing can better demonstrate the knitting together of the ideas presented in the preceding portions of this chapter better than the popular exposition of Sunni doctrine written by the tenth-century Egyptian theologian and Hanafi jurist Abu Ja'far Ahmad al-Tahawi (d. 933 CE). Tahawi was a contemporary of both Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 935 CE), who was the supreme authority for Sunni theologians, and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944 CE), founder of the other Sunni school of theology, which flourished in Samarkand in the area of modern Uzbekistan. Tahawi is best known for his creed (*'aqida*) in rhymed prose, known as *Bayan al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a* (Exposition of Sunna and the Position of the Community). By his time, the political and theological issues that had created rifts within the Muslim community had been argued by scholars and theologians for more than two centuries, and the belief set of those who became known as Sunni had crystallized. Tahawi's exposition of the Sunni creed is admired not only for its thoughtful delineating of the main principles of Sunni Islam but also for its poetic language and beautiful literary form. The following translation of portions of this creed is based on the translation of the entire work by E.E. Elder.[37] The reader acquainted with the historical disputes that raged over the first three centuries of Islamic history can detect how Tahawi stakes out the Sunni position on the political and theological issues that defined the controversies that led to the creation of a clarified Sunni theology.

SELECTIONS FROM TAHAWI'S CREED OF SUNNI ISLAM

> We say concerning the unity of God, while trusting in the assistance of God—who is exalted in Himself—that Allah is one. He has no partner, and nothing resembles Him, nor does anything limit Him. There is no deity other than Him. He is eternal (*qadim*) without a beginning and ever existing (*da'im*) without an end. He is not destroyed nor does He perish. Nothing comes into being

but as He wills. Imaginative thoughts (*awham*) do not apprehend Him nor do intelligences comprehend Him. Creatures are not like Him. He is the Living that does not die, the Ever Wakeful that does not sleep, the Creator without a need. Allah is Independent, a Sustainer without provision; He is the One who fearlessly causes things to die and raises [others] from the dead without fatigue. . . .

He created all creatures through His knowledge and decreed for them their fates. He has set for them appointed times. None of their deeds was hidden from Him before He created them, and He knows what they will do before He creates them. He commanded them to obey Him and forbade them to disobey Him. Everything occurs by His Power and Will. Creatures have no will except as He wills. Whatever He wills for them comes into existence; whatever He does not will, does not.

He guides aright whomsoever He wills and preserves from error whomsoever He wills. He grants security to whomsoever He wills as an act of grace (*fadl*). He leads astray whomsoever He wills. He abstains from aiding and punishes whomsoever He wills as a matter of justice. Everything exists in His willing between His grace and His justice. No one can avert His destiny, replace His judgment, or prevail over His command.

We believe all of this and assure ourselves that everything is from God. Muhammad is His chosen creature, His particular faithful one, His favored Messenger, the Seal of the Prophets, the Imam of the God-Fearing, the chief of those who are sent, and the Beloved of the Lord of the worlds. Every claim to prophetic office after him is a delusion and a vain desire. [Muhamamd] is the one sent to all the Jinn and humanity with truth and guidance, with light and radiance.

We believe that the Qur'an is the speech of God. From Him it began as an utterance without any modality. He sent it down to His Prophet as a revelation. As such, the believers assent to the Qur'an as a Reality.

They assure themselves that it is in fact the speech of God—who is mighty and majestic—and not something created like the speech of human beings. Whoever upon hearing [the Qur'an] asserts that it is the speech of human beings is thereby an unbeliever. Allah has admonished, rebuked, and threatened him with hellfire, since God has said: "I will broil him in hellfire" (74:26). When God threatened with hellfire the one who said, "This is only the speech of humankind" (74:25), we knew and were assured that it was the saying of the Creator of humankind, for human sayings do not resemble His.

Whoever qualifies [God] with any of the notions of humanity is therefore an unbeliever. The one who perceives this takes warning and refrains from anything that is like the sayings of the unbelievers, for he knows that God in His attributes is not like humankind. . . .

No one is secure in his religion but he who surrenders to Allah and to His Messenger—may God bless him and give him peace—and commits the knowledge of what confuses him to the One who knows. The foundation of Islam is firmly established on surrender and submission alone. Whoever seeks knowledge about what is forbidden to him, and whose understanding is not content to surrender, will be precluded in his quest from declaring the absolute unity of the Deity, from pure cognition and sound belief. Therefore, he vacillates between unbelief

and belief, assertion and contradiction, confession and denial, troubled by the whisperings of Satan, perplexed, rebellious, and separated from the community of the faithful, neither an assenting believer nor a contradicting denier. . . .

He who is saved (*sa'id,* literally, "happy") is saved through the destiny of God, and he who is damned (*shaqi,* literally, "miserable") is damned through the destiny of God. The principle of God's decree is His secret in His creation. Neither an angel near to His presence nor a Prophet entrusted with a message has gained knowledge of this. Speculating deeply about this subject brings one near to desertion by Allah and is a step toward denial and disobedience. Therefore, be on your guard against this in thought, consideration, and evil suggestion. Verily God has concealed the knowledge of His decree from His creatures and has forbidden them to search for it. As He has said: "He shall not be questioned about what He does, but they shall be questioned" (21:23). Whoever asks, "Why did God do this?" [i.e. questions God disapprovingly] has rejected the judgment of the Qur'an and becomes an unbeliever. . . .

This is part of the covenant of belief, the fundamental knowledge and the confession of the unity and lordship of God, just as God said in His glorious Book: "He created everything and then decreed it absolutely" (25:2). He also said: "And the command of Allah was a decreed decree" (33:38). Thus, woe to him who becomes an adversary of God's decree or brings to the consideration of it a diseased heart. . . .

We say that God took Abraham as a friend and spoke to Moses in a voice (4:162) for the sake of belief, assent, and submission. We believe in the Angels, the Prophets, and the Books that were sent down to those entrusted with a message. We bear witness that they are all manifestly true. We call the people who follow our direction of prayer Muslims and believers, as long as they continue to confess to what the Prophet brought and assent to what he said and narrated. . . .

We do not impute unbelief to any of the people who follow our direction of prayer because of sin, so long as they do not make it lawful, nor do we say that a sin that accompanies belief will not harm the one who does it. We hope for those Muslims who do good works, yet we do not feel secure about them, nor do we bear witness that the Garden is theirs [by entitlement]. We ask God to forgive the evildoers; we fear for them and ask forgiveness for them as we do for ourselves and we do not despair for them. Either feeling independent of God or despairing of God removes one from the religion of Islam. The way of Reality lies midway between these two for those who follow our direction of prayer. The creature does not depart from belief except by the denial of that which brought him to it.

Belief is confession by the tongue and assent by the mind that all God sent down in the Qur'an and in the Law and by way of proof is authentic and true regarding the Messenger of God. Belief is one, and people are fundamentally equal. Differences among people arise through their nature and godliness, through forsaking vain desires, and holding on to that which is best . . .

We do not approve the use of the sword against any person of the community of Muhammad unless it is required to use the sword against him. We do not approve of secession from our Imams and those in authority. Even if they rule

tyrannically over us, we do not curse them or restrain any hand from obeying them. We consider obeying them an ordinance of God because judgment over human affairs is part of obedience to God (4:62). We pray for the welfare and security [of our leaders].

We follow the Sunna and the Community (*al-sunna wa'l-jama'a*) and we shun that which deviates, is contrary, and divisive. We love the people of justice and trustworthiness, and hate the people of tyranny and treachery. We say, "Allah knows best concerning the knowledge that confuses us."...

We love the Companions of the Messenger of God. We are not remiss in loving any one of them nor do we repudiate any one of them. We hate him who hates them or mentions them disrespectfully. We mention them only respectfully. Love for them is [being] religious, believing, and doing good; hatred for them is unbelief, hypocrisy, and perverseness. ...

Whoever speaks well of the Companions of the Messenger of God, of his wives who are pure of any defilement, and of his progeny, who are far removed from every abomination, is innocent of hypocrisy. The learned among the Forerunners (*al-Salaf*), their Successors (*al-Tabi'un*), those who came after them of the people of narrative and precedent, and the people of *fiqh* and speculation are only to be mentioned favorably. Whoever mentions them badly is not on the right path. We do not prefer any one of the saints (*awliya'*) to any of the Prophets. We say, "One prophet is better than all the saints." We believe in what has been passed down of their miracles (*karamat*) and those narratives that are authentic from trustworthy people.

We consider the Community real and correct but divisiveness we consider a turning away from the right and an affliction.

CONCLUSION: SUNNI ISLAM TODAY AND THE ROAD AHEAD

The history of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a* shows that religious, ethical, and political concerns cannot be easily separated, as the stability of community and the common good are of paramount importance. Because of this, what begins as a religious issue may become a political power struggle, and vice versa. The original Sunni–Shi'a split attests to this, stemming as it does from a dispute over the best way to devise a social system in keeping with the ideals of Islam. The impulse that led to the Sunni–Shi'a split in the early centuries of Islam was driven by differences of opinion on how to create the best society possible, led by the best leader possible and displaying the character of the Prophet. The best society for Muslims is one that is in communion with God, and whose laws and means of governance are informed and bounded by ethics that are in keeping with God's preference for humankind. This is the only accurate definition of an "Islamic" community—or an "Islamic State"—and it has been the ambition of every Islamic political movement. Because this was the impulse that first divided the Islamic body politic, it is potentially the area in which achieving consensus

could be vital for uniting Muslims in agreement on the terms of a universal social contract. This is where modern *ijtihad* (scholarship in the area of law) is needed—to remove from the historical legacy of Islamic theology ideas that were based on the politics of earlier times and re-craft an Islamic political theory that is suitable for modern times and fully in keeping with the ethics of the Qur'an and the Sunna.

All Muslims today belong to a global body politic. The Islamic *Umma* is a subset of this global body politic. As we move our eyes in our living rooms from reading the pages of early Islamic history to watching the evening news on television, we witness the continued intersection of religion and politics in current events. As Muslims contemplate their role in this new world, the larger question we all wonder about is this: How might Muslims craft a coherent understanding between religion and politics, and make this globally meaningful and relevant to today's world?

NOTES

1. A *hadith* is a report of a saying or action of the Prophet Muhammad. *Hadith* (with a capital h) in English is used to indicate the entire corpus of *hadiths.*

2. Note that the Sunni–Shi'a distinction is not true of the ethical content of the Hadith; there is a great overlap of many Sunni and Shiite hadiths. The difference is most pronounced in those hadith texts that refer to political controversies.

3. Although the original doctrine of the Shi'a was that rulership had to be from the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through 'Ali, we see today in Shiite Iran the rule of nondescendants, such as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

4. The first crisis occurred during the time of the Caliph Abu Bakr. At the battle of Yamama (632 CE) the heavy loss of life among the Qur'an readers, who were among the Prophet's Companions, prompted 'Umar ibn al-Khattab to approach Abu Bakr and urge him to make a complete compilation of the Qur'an. Abu Bakr and 'Umar approached Zayd ibn Thabit, one of the Prophet's scribes, and charged him with the task of putting together a complete compilation of the Qur'an, culled from the memory and written notes of all the Prophet's surviving companions. The completed copy of the Qur'an remained with Abu Bakr until he died, and then with 'Umar, who became the second Caliph, until the end of his life. Finally, it was entrusted to Hafsa, 'Umar's daughter and a former wife of the Prophet Muhammad. See Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, ed. and trans., *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Pakistan: Sethi Straw Board Mills, Ltd, 1971), vol. 6, 478; Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'an, Bab Jam' al-Qur'an (Book of the Excellences of the Qur'an, Chapter on the Collection of the Qur'an).

5. Ibid.

6. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *al-Fath al-Bari',* vol. 9, 14, quoted in Labib as-Said, *The Recited Koran, A History of the First Recorded Version,* trans. Bernard Weiss, M.A. Rauf and Morroe Berger (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1975) 23.

7. Ibn al-Athir, Majd al-Din Abu'l–Sa'ada al-Mubarak ibn Muhammad, *Al-Nihaya fi-gharib al-hadith wa'l-athar,* Cairo, 1963-6, vol. III, 85-86, quoted in ibid., 23.

8. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* vol. 6, 479.

9. Talha and Zubayr were among a group of six members of a consultative committee who were nominated by ‘Umar to be potential successors: ‘Uthman, ‘Ali, Zubayr, Talha, ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Awf, and Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqas.

10. *Kharaju,* meaning, "They left or exited." The name eventually given to this faction, *Khariji,* thus means, "one who exits," or in a wider sense, "secessionist." In Arabic, this group of Muslim dissidents is called *al-Khawarij,* the plural of *khariji.* They are called *Kharijites* in English.

11. Muhammad Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-Umam wa'l-Muluk* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964) vol. 2, 199.

12. This position was a powerful statement opposing both the Sunni position of the time that the leader had to be from the tribe of Quraysh and the Shi‘a position that he had to be from the line of ‘Ali.

13. Note the similarities between Azraqi Kharijite beliefs and those of some modern Muslim extremists, who also judge those disagreeing with them as apostates, even to the point of murdering them along with their innocent spouses and children.

14. This term, *al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun* in Arabic, refers to the first four Caliphs, who ruled in Medina: Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Ali. The names of these Caliphs adorn many a mosque in beautiful calligraphy, together with the names of ‘Ali's two sons Hasan and Husayn. In such mosques, the names *Allah* (God) and Muhammad are also prominently displayed.

15. In Islamic jurisprudence, *taqlid* is the opposite of *ijtihad,* the effort of a scholar to arrive at a correct legal opinion. *Taqlid* thus means to follow the opinions of others without understanding or scrutiny, or in the words of Sayf al-Din al-Amidi (d. 1233 CE), "To accept the rulings of others when such rulings are not coupled with a conclusive argument" (*Al-Ihkam fi Usul al-Ahkam,* Cairo 1347 AH, vol. III, 166). Many Muslims today are under the impression that following *taqlid* is always a bad or shameful thing. *Taqlid* has often been used as a pejorative term in Islamic discourse. This is unfortunate because in almost every field of human endeavor, people follow the advice of experts. The proper practice of *taqlid* is thus nothing more than recognizing one's own professional limitations. Neither does *taqlid* necessarily mean that one is ignorant of religion. When a modern-day physics student learns Newton's formulas, he is a *muqallid* (imitator or follower) of Newton. Such usage does not lower a person's standing in the least unless it is applied where it does not belong; in that case the imitator would be justly criticized. The real issue of *taqlid* thus becomes one of knowing how far to follow the guidance of another. A great and innovative scholar like Imam Ghazali was a *muqallid* in that he followed the principles established by prior Imams like Shafi‘i. However, he also disagreed with such authorities in certain instances.

16. According to Shafi‘i, Prophetic precedent in Islamic law is made up of three types of Sunna: (1) verbal statements of the Prophet (*sunna qawliyya*), (2) normative actions of the Prophet (*sunna fi‘liyya*), and (3) the tacit consent of the Prophet indicated by his silence with reference to an event that happened in his presence (*sunna taqririyya*).

17. For example, the Prophet made his Hajj pilgrimage only once, and began his Hajj from Medina. This, however, does not mean that a Muslim is prohibited from doing the Hajj several times or is required to start the Hajj from Medina.

18. *Al-Fiqh ʿala-l-madhahib al-khamsa,* jurisprudence according to the five major schools of law, is a common expression that embraces the notion that the four major schools of Sunni law (Maliki, Hanafi, Shafiʿi, and Hanbali), plus the Shiite Jaʿfari school of law, have come to be accepted as the dominant interpretations. The differences between the Jaʿfari school of law and any one of the other four Sunni schools are no greater than the differences between any one of the Sunni schools and the other three. If not for the political differences that originally differentiated Shiʿas from Sunnis, one could argue that all five legal schools flowed out of the same tradition, each school preferring certain interpretive or structural legal principles over others.

19. In Shafiʿi usage, the former concept of the *sunna* of the Prophet's Companions was subsumed into the developing legal category of consensus (*ijmaʿ*). In Hanbali thought, for example, the consensus of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and in particular the practices, beliefs, and customs of the first rightly guided Caliphs, is of greater value than the consensus of later scholars. This led Ahmad Ibn Hanbal to speak of *Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jamaʿa wa'l-Athar,* in which the word *athar* meant "the precedents," referring to the precedents of the Prophet and his closest Companions.

20. It should not be forgotten that during the time of Shafiʿi and the founders of the major Sunni schools of jurisprudence (who died between the years 767 and 855 CE), the "six classical works" of Sunni Hadith collection had not yet been compiled. Most of these works were composed in the following century. The founders of major Sunni schools of jurisprudence were:

1. Imam Hasan al-Basri, who lived in Medina and then in Basra (d. 729)
2. Imam Abu Hanifa, who lived in Kufa and Baghdad (d. 767)
3. Imam ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Awzaʿi of Syria (d. 774)
4. Imam Sufyan al-Thawri of Kufa and Basra (d. 778)
5. Imam Layth ibn Saʿd of Egypt (d. 791)
6. Imam Malik ibn Anas of Medina (d. 795)
7. Imam Sufyan ibn ʿUyayna of Mecca (d. 814)
8. Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafiʿi (d. in Egypt 820)
9. Imam Ishaq ibn Ibrahim, better known as Ibn Rahawayh, of Nishapur (d. 853)
10. Imam Ibrahim ibn Khalid, better known as Abu Thawr, of Baghdad (d. 855)
11. Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. in Baghdad in 855)
12. Imam Dawud ibn ʿAli al-Zahiri (d. in Baghdad in 883)
13. Imam Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, (d. in Baghdad in 922)

The six classical works of Sunni Hadith are:

1. *Sahih* of al-Bukhari (d. 870)
2. *Sahih* of Muslim (d. 875)

3. *Sunan* of Ibn Maja (d. 886)
4. *Sunan* of Abu Dawud (d. 888)
5. *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhi (d. 892)
6. *Sunan* of al-Nasa'i (d. 915)

The compilers of the five most esteemed Shi'a books of Hadith lived even later,dying between 939 and 1067 CE. They are:

1. *Al-Usul al-Kafi* of al-Kulayni (d. 939)
2. *Man la Yastahdiruhu'l-Faqih* of al-Qummi (d. 991)
3. *Tahdhib al-Ahkam* by al-Tusi (d. 1067)
4. *Al-Istibsar fi-ma Akhtalafa fihi al-Akhbar,* also by al-Tusi
5. *Nahj al-Balagha* of al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044)

21. The reader should note that the differences we are speaking of were not major. For the most part, they were minor differences on issues of ritual, such as whether one's feet had to be washed or wiped during the ablution or the definition of the part of the body that males and females have to cover during prayer or in the presence of the opposite sex.

22. A genre of traditions called *Isra'iliyyat* ("Tales of the Israelites") entered Muslim discourse via Jews and Christians. Many of these accounts dealt with biblical narratives of the Prophet Moses and the second coming of Jesus. In addition, deeply ingrained customs such as the African practice of clitoridectomy (popularly known as female circumcision), which were not practiced in the Arabian peninsula of the Prophet's time, were "Islamized" and thus continued to be practiced in the regions where they had originally occurred.

23. Tabari, *Ta'rikh,* vol. 3, 1113 and 1118.

24. Martin Hinds, *Mihna,* article in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Brill Academic Publishers, CD-ROM 2004).

25. *Kitab al-Sunna,* 38; *Manaqib,* 159–161.

26. *Kitab al-Sunna,* 35.

27. This was the precedent of Abu Bakr (the first Caliph after the Prophet) who appointed 'Umar b. al-Khattab.

28. This can be seen as a nod to the Kharijite position of *la hukma illa lillah* ("There is no ruling but through God"). In addition, it gives more power to the ulama as interpreters of the Law.

29. *Kitab al-Suuna,* 35.

30. Islamic law divides jurisprudence into two broad categories: worship (*'ibadat*), concerning the laws of ritual worship, and worldly actions (*mu'amalat*). These are divided into four categories: criminal law, personal law, law of contracts (which today would include business law), and the law of governance or of nations (in modern parlance, constitutional and international law).

31. The popular view of Hanbali thought as rigorous or rigid is mainly due to their rejection of any form of worship that may be attributed to vestiges of foreign cultures or religions.

32. *Kitab al-Sunna,* 34.

33. Ibid., 35–36.

34. Other terms that refer to the worshiper working on his or her own inner self are *'abid* (worshipper) and *nasik* (scrupulous adherent to liturgical practices). As an outward sign of the asceticism, some Sufis wore rough woolen cloth (*suf,* from which some say the name Sufi originated) as a reaction against the more luxurious clothing of the courts. Not yet known by the appellation of Sufi, they tried to achieve a sensitive and loving relationship with God based on the Quranic verse: "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54).

35. Not to be confused with another poem of the same name composed by the Egyptian Sufi al-Busiri in the thirteenth century CE.

36. The Sunnis and the Mu'tazilites both considered Hasan al-Basri as one of group. His name appears in the chains of teaching (*silsila*) of many Sufi orders, and he is cited innumerable times in moral works of exhortation. The influence of his ascetic piety persisted in Basra. In the chief work of the Sufi school of Basra, *Qut al-Qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts) by Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 998), it is stated: "Hasan is our Imam in the doctrine we represent. We walk in his footsteps, we follow his ways, and from his lamp we have our light" (*Qut al-Qulub,* Cairo 1961, vol. I, 149).

37. The MacDonald Presentation Volume, Princeton University Press 1933, pp. 131ff.

15

What Is Shiite Islam?

Azim Nanji
Farhad Daftary

The historical formation of the worldwide Muslim community or *Umma,* as it is known in Arabic, has resulted in a great deal of diversity that reflects a rich intellectual, spiritual, and institutional pluralism. In seeking to express a response to the primal message of Islam, Muslims have developed distinct perspectives that have led various groups to coalesce around different interpretations of the core message of the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. One such perspective is that of Shiite Islam. Rather than perceive these expressions as sectarian in a narrow sense, it is more appropriate to recognize them as representing different communities of interpretation with diverse views of how the ideals of Islam might be realized in the life of the *Umma*. Unfortunately, much early scholarship on Shi'ism has represented this perspective as a dissident voice or heterodoxy, and in some cases has even characterized it as a ''Persian'' response to ''Arab'' Islam. Recent scholarship has created a more balanced view of Shi'ism. Thus, it is now possible to move beyond stereotypical assumptions and reject the view that there is an ''orthodox'' or ''authentic'' Islam, from which Shi'ism is a departure.

The Shi'a, like other Muslim groups, reflect their own diversity but share a common approach to the fundamentals of Islamic belief. While affirming, in common with their fellow Muslim believers, the *Shahada,* that is, belief in the unity of God and the model of divine guidance through God's Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, the Shi'a maintain that for the spiritual and moral guidance of the community, God instructed the Prophet to designate a figure of authority to succeed him as leader of the Muslims. This authority was 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law. According to the Shi'a, this conception of the community's future leadership was made public by the Prophet in the last year of his life at Ghadir Khumm, where he designated 'Ali as his successor to lead the Muslims. While both Shiite and Sunni sources refer to this event, it is the specific interpretation of the role of 'Ali as an authentic leader or ''Imam of Guidance'' that distinguishes the

Shiite interpretation of authority and leadership from that of other Muslim communities.

The word *Shi'a* means "partisan" or "adherent." Specifically, it refers to those Muslims who became followers of 'Ali, with the conviction that he and his descendants were the rightful authorities of the Muslim community. For the Shi'a, this conviction is implicit in the revelation of the Qur'an and the history of Islam and is not merely the outcome of differences of a purely political nature following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In order to understand how such an interpretation developed and created a distinctive Shiite identity in Muslim history, it is important to see how the Shi'a ground the concept of guidance within their interpretation of the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet.

One aspect of the Qur'anic revelation that scholars of the Shiite tradition often emphasize is the notion of authority linked to the families of prophetic figures. This notion is evoked in the following Qur'anic verses:

> Truly, God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imran above all the worlds, as offspring one after the other. (Qur'an 3:33–34)
>
> Each of them we preferred above the worlds and their fathers, descendants and brothers. We chose them and we guided them to the straight path.... They are the ones to whom we have given the Book, the authority and prophethood.
>
> (Qur'an 6:84–89)

During his lifetime, the Prophet Muhammad was both the recipient and the expounder of divine revelation. His death in 632 CE marked the conclusion of the line of prophecy and the beginning of the debate over the nature of his legacy for future generations. This debate arose because of the absence of consensus over succession to the Prophet in the nascent Muslim community. From the beginning, there was a clear difference of views on this matter between the *Shi'at 'Ali,* the Party of 'Ali, who believed that the Prophet had designated 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661 CE) as his successor, and those who followed the leadership of the Caliphs. This latter group eventually coalesced into the majoritarian, Sunni branch of Islam, known collectively as the "People of the Sunna and the Community," *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a.*

The Shi'a of Imam 'Ali maintained that, while revelation ceased at the Prophet's death, the need for the spiritual and moral guidance of the community, through an ongoing interpretation and implementation of the Islamic message, continued. They believed that the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad was entrusted to his family, the *Ahl al-Bayt* (literally, "People of the Household"), in whom the Prophet had invested authority. The first member of the Prophet's family designated for leadership was Imam 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and the husband of Fatima, his daughter and only surviving child. According to most traditions, 'Ali was the first male convert to Islam and had earned the Prophet's admiration by championing the cause of Islam,

even at the risk of his life. The Shiite espousal of the right of ʻAli and that of his descendants, through Fatima, to the leadership of the Muslim community was rooted in their understanding of the Holy Qur'an and its concept of rightly guided leadership, as reinforced by Prophetic traditions (*Hadith*). For the Shiʻa the most prominent of these traditions was the Prophet's sermon at Ghadir Khumm, following his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca, in which he designated ʻAli as his successor. During this sermon, the Prophet stated that he was leaving behind "two weighty things" (*thaqalayn*)—the Holy Qur'an and his family—for the future guidance of his community.

The importance of the *Ahl al-Bayt* for the Shiʻa is also demonstrated in an event linked to the revelation of a well-known Qur'anic verse: "God only wishes to remove from you all impurities, O *Ahl al-Bayt* and purify you with a complete purification" (Qur'an 33:33). According to historical tradition, this verse concerns an event in the Prophet's life when the Christian leadership of the town of Najran in Arabia challenged him as to the veracity of his mission. The two sides agreed upon a mutual imprecation, but the Christians eventually declined. Those referred to as the *Ahl al-Bayt* in this Qur'anic passage were the Prophet Muhammad, ʻAli, Fatima, and the latter two's sons, Hasan and Husayn. Shiites also refer to the Qur'anic verse: "Say: I do not seek any reward from you, except love for those near to me" (Qur'an 42:23). The Shiʻa believe that this verse also refers to the Ahl al-Bayt. While such interpretations are specific to the Shiʻa, all Muslims hold the Prophet's family in great reverence and follow the admonition of the Qur'an: "Truly God and His angels bless the Prophet. O you who believe, bless him and greet him with peace" (Qur'an 33:50).

The Shiʻa attest that after the Prophet Muhammad, the authority for the guidance of the Muslim community was vested in Imam ʻAli. Just as it was the prerogative of the Prophet to designate his successor, so it is the prerogative of each Imam of the time to designate his successor from among his male progeny. Hence, the office of the Imam, the *Imamate,* is passed on by heredity in the Prophet's bloodline via ʻAli and Fatima.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF SHIʻISM

The early partisans of ʻAli included the so-called Qur'an Readers, several close Companions of the Prophet, prominent residents of the city of Medina, tribal chiefs of distinction, and other Muslims who had rendered important services to early Islam. Their foremost teacher and guide was ʻAli ibn Abi Talib who, in his sermons and letters and in his admonitions to the leaders of the Quraysh tribe, reminded Muslims of the rights of his family.

Pro-ʻAlid sentiments persisted in ʻAli's lifetime. They were revived during the Caliphate of ʻUthman (r. 644–656 CE), which was a period of strife in the Muslim community. ʻAli succeeded to the Caliphate in turbulent

circumstances following ‘Uthman’s murder, leading to the first civil war in Islam. Centred in Kufa, in southern Iraq, the partisans of ‘Ali now became designated as *Shi‘at ‘Ali,* the “Party of ‘Ali,” or simply as the Shi‘a. They also referred to themselves by terms with more precise religious connotations, such as *Shi‘at Ahl al-Bayt* (Party of the Prophet’s Household) or its equivalent, *Shi‘at Al Muhammad* (Party of the Family of Muhammad). The Umayyad Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (d. 680 CE), the powerful governor of Syria, cousin of ‘Uthman, and leader of the pro-‘Uthman party, found the call for avenging ‘Uthman’s murder a suitable pretext for seizing the Caliphate.

The early Shi‘a survived ‘Ali’s murder in 661 CE and the tragic events that followed. After ‘Ali, the Shi‘a of Kufa recognized his eldest son Hasan (d. 669 CE) as his successor to the Caliphate. However, Hasan chose not to assume this role and Mu‘awiya assumed the Caliphate. After making a peace treaty with Mu‘awiya, Hasan retired to Medina and abstained from political activity. However, the Shi‘a continued to regard him as their Imam after ‘Ali. On Hasan’s death, the Kufan Shi‘a revived their aspirations for restoring the Caliphate to the Prophet’s family and invited Hasan’s younger brother Husayn, their new Imam, to rise against the oppressive rule of the Umayyads. In the aftermath of Mu‘awiya’s death and the succession of his son Yazid (r. 680–683 CE), Husayn refused to acknowledge Yazid. Responding to the call of many of his followers and supporters, he set out for Kufa. On 10 Muharram 61 (10 October 680), Husayn and his small band of relatives and companions were brutally massacred at Karbala, some distance from Kufa, where they were intercepted by an Umayyad army. The martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson infused new fervour to the Shiite cause and contributed significantly to the consolidation of the Shiite ethos and identity. It also led to the formation of activist trends among the Shi‘a. Later, the Shi‘a would commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn on the tenth of Muharram. This holiday, which is more the commemoration of a tragedy than a festive celebration, is known as *‘Ashura.*

During the period of Umayyad rule (661–750 CE), different Shiite groups, consisting of both Arab Muslims and new non-Arab converts, sought to support different candidates for the Imamate. The leadership of the Shi‘a grew beyond the immediate family of the Prophet Muhammad and now included other branches of the Banu Hashim, the Prophet’s extended family, including the descendants of the Prophet’s uncles Abu Talib and ‘Abbas. This was because the notion of the Prophet’s family was then conceived broadly, in its old Arabian tribal sense. As the Muslim world continued to expand geographically and more people from the conquered territories became part of the growing *Umma,* the various Muslim groups, including the Shi‘a, attracted new adherents.

A large group of the Shi‘a, known as the *Imamiyya* (Imamis), adopted a quietist policy in the political field while concentrating on Islam’s intellectual promotion and development. Their Imams traced authority through Imam

Husayn's sole surviving son, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin ("Ornament of the Worshippers," d. 712 CE), who was held in great esteem in the pious circles of Medina. It was after 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin that the Imami Shi'a began to gain importance under his son and successor Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 731 CE). A small group chose to support Zayd, another son of Zayn al-'Abidin, and organized themselves to actively oppose Umayyad rule. This group and their followers later became known as the *Zaydiyya* (Zaydis).

Imam al-Baqir concentrated on being an active teacher during his Imamate of nearly 20 years. He also introduced the principle of *taqiyya,* the precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious belief and practice that was to protect the Imams and their followers under adverse circumstances. His Imamate coincided with the growth and development of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In this formative period of Islam, Imam al-Baqir's role was primarily as a reporter of Hadith and a teacher of law. Upon his death, his followers recognized his eldest son Abu 'Abdallah Ja'far (d. 765 CE), later called al-Sadiq (the Trustworthy), as their new Imam.

In addition to the Zaydis, other proponents of the Shiite position—notably the Abbasids, descendants of the Prophet's uncle 'Abbas—embarked on a direct challenge to Umayyad rule. The Abbasids paid particular attention to developing the political organization of their own movement, establishing secret headquarters in Kufa but concentrating their activities in eastern Iran and Central Asia. The Abbasid mission (*da'wa*) was preached in the name of an unidentified person belonging to the Prophet's family. This ideology aimed to maximize support from the Shi'a of different groups who supported the leadership of the Ahl al-Bayt. In 749 CE, the Abbasids achieved victory over the Umayyads. They proclaimed Abu'l-'Abbas al-Saffah (r. 749–754 CE) as the first Abbasid Caliph in the mosque of Kufa. The Abbasid victory proved a source of disillusionment for those Shi'a who had expected a descendant of 'Ali, rather than an Abbasid, to succeed to the Caliphate. The animosity between the Abbasids and the 'Alids increased when, soon after their accession, the Abbasids began to persecute many of their former Shiite supporters and 'Alids and subsequently promoted a Sunni interpretation of Islam. The Abbasids' breach with their Shiite roots was finally completed when the third Caliph of the dynasty, Muhammad al-Mahdi (r. 775–785 CE), declared that the Prophet had actually appointed his uncle 'Abbas, rather than 'Ali, as his successor.

Meanwhile, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq had acquired a widespread reputation as a teacher and scholar. He was a reporter of Hadith and is cited as such in the chain of authorities (*isnad*) accepted by all Muslim schools of law. He also taught Islamic jurisprudence. He is credited with founding, along with his father, the Imami Shiite school of religious law. This school of law is now called *Ja'fari* after Ja'far al-Sadiq. Imam al-Sadiq was accepted as a leading authority not only by his own Shiite partisans but also by a wider circle that included many Sunni Muslims. In time, Imam al-Sadiq acquired a

noteworthy group of scholars around himself, comprising some of the most eminent jurists, traditionists, and theologians of the time such as Hisham ibn al-Hakam (d. 795 CE), then the foremost representative of Imami scholastic theology (*kalam*). During Ja'far's Imamate, the Shi'a came to develop distinct positions on theological and legal issues and contributed to the wider debates and discussions within Muslim intellectual circles.

As a result of the activities of Imam al-Sadiq and his associates, and building on the teachings of Imam al-Baqir, the doctrine of the Imamate received its main outline, consolidating principles that were traced back to the teachings of the early Imams and the Prophet Muhammad. The first principle was that of *nass,* the transfer of the Imamate by explicit designation. On the basis of *nass,* the Imamate could be located in a specific individual, whether or not the recipient claimed the Caliphate or exercised political authority. This principle established a separation of powers in Shi'ism, detaching the necessity of political authority from the institution of the Imamate, according to historical circumstances. The second principle was that of an Imamate based on *'ilm,* special religious knowledge. In the light of this knowledge, which was divinely inspired and transmitted through the *nass* of the preceding Imam, the rightful Imam of the time became the source of knowledge and spiritual teaching for his followers.

Rooted in the teachings of the Imams, the doctrine of the Imamate emphasizes the complementarity between revelation and intellectual reflection. It recognizes that the Holy Qur'an addresses different levels of meaning: the apparent meaning of the text, the esoteric meaning of the text, the legal parameters that guide human action, and the ethical vision that Allah intends to realize for human beings in an integrated moral society. According to the Shi'a, the Qur'an thus offers believers the possibility of deriving new insights to address the needs of the time in which Muslims live.

The Shiite doctrine of the Imamate, expressed in numerous *hadiths* reported mainly from Ja'far al-Sadiq, is preserved in the earliest collection of Shiite traditions, compiled by Abu Ja'far Muhammad al-Kulayni (d. 940 CE). This doctrine was founded on the belief in the permanent need for a divinely guided Imam who, after the Prophet Muhammad, would act as an authoritative teacher and a spiritual guide for humankind. While the Imam historically was entitled to both temporal leadership and religious authority, his mandate was independent of temporal power. This doctrine also confirmed the belief that the Prophet designated Imam 'Ali as his legatee (*wasi*) and successor, by an explicit *nass* under divine command. After 'Ali, the Imamate was transmitted from father to son by *nass,* among the descendants of 'Ali and Fatima; after Husayn, it would continue in the line of Husayn's descendants until the end of time.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq died in 765 CE. A conflict soon arose over who should be the next Imam. This dispute over the succession to Imam al-Sadiq resulted in new divisions within the Shi'a and led to the eventual formation of the two

main Shiite communities, the *Ithna'ashariyya* or "Twelvers" (also called Imamis), and the *Ismailiyya,* the Ismailis. The Ismailis, who followed Muhammad ibn Isma'il, a grandson of Ja'far al-Sadiq, are the second largest Shiite community after the Twelvers. The third branch of the Shi'a, the Zaydis, had their own separate historical development.

IMAMI OR TWELVER SHI'ISM

After Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's death, the majority of his followers acknowledged one of his surviving sons, Musa al-Kazim (d. 799 CE), as his successor to the Imamate. Placed under the control of the Abbasid rulers, Imam Musa was constrained in his activities and, according to his followers, was poisoned while being detained by the Abbasid Caliph's representatives in Baghdad. He was succeeded by his son, 'Ali al-Rida (d. 818 CE), who faced similar tribulations. After also dying under suspicious circumstances, he was buried in a place that has come to be known as *Mashhad* (Place of Witness), one of the holiest sites in Iran. Imam 'Ali al-Rida was succeeded by his very young son, Muhammad al-Jawad (d. 835 CE), also known as al-Taqi (The God-Fearing). Muhammad al-Jawad died in Baghdad at the age of 25 and was buried next to Musa al-Kazim. The next two Imams, 'Ali al-Hadi (d. 868 CE) and Hasan al-'Askari (d. 874 CE), led very restricted lives under Abbasid detention. Both are believed to have died of poisoning and were buried in the Iraqi city of Samarra. The dome of their tomb in Samarra was destroyed by anti-Shiite insurgents in February 2006. Hasan al-'Askari's followers believed that his successor, Muhammad al-Mahdi, was five years old when his father died. It is further held that soon after, Muhammad al-Mahdi went into *ghayba,* literally a state of "absence" or occultation. Eventually, the main body of the Imami Shi'a held that Muhammad al-Mahdi had been born to Hasan al-Askari in 869 CE but that the child had remained hidden, even from his father. They further held that al-Mahdi had succeeded his father to the Imamate while remaining in concealment. Identified as the *Mahdi* (The Guided One) or *al-Qa'im* (The Restorer), Muhammad al-Mahdi is expected to reappear and rule the world with justice in the period immediately preceding the final Day of Judgment. Because he is the twelfth in the Imami line of Imams, his followers are called the Ithna'asharis, the Twelvers.

According to Imami tradition, Muhammad al-Mahdi's occultation fell into two periods. The first, "lesser occultation" (*al-ghayba al-sughra*) covered the years 874–941 CE. During this period, the Imam is believed to have remained in regular contact with four successive agents, called variously the Gate (*Bab*), Emissary (*Safir*), or Deputy (*Na'ib*), who acted as intermediaries between the Imam and his community. However, in the "greater occultation" (*al-ghayba al-kubra*), which started in 941CE and continues to this day, the hidden Imam does not act through a specific representative. Imami Shiite scholars

have written extensively on the eschatological doctrine of the occultation of the twelfth Imam and the conditions that are expected to prevail before his return. These doctrines were institutionalized at the end of the first half of the tenth century CE, after the line of 12 Imams had been identified.

In the first period of their religious history, the Imami Shiites benefited from the direct guidance and teachings of their Imams. In the second period of Imami history, from the occultation of the twelfth Imam until the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century CE, eminent scholars emerged as influential guardians and transmitters of the teachings of the Imams, compiling Hadith collections and formulating the Ja'fari school of law. This period coincided with the rise of the Buyid, or Buwayhid Sultans (ca. 932–1055 CE). The Buyids were a military clan of Persian origin who came to power in Iran and Iraq and acted as overlords for the Sunni Abbasid Caliphs. The Buyids were originally Zaydi Shiites from Daylam in northern Iran, but once in power they supported Shi'ism without allegiance to any of its specific branches. They also supported the rationalist Mu'tazili school of Islamic theology. It was under their influence that Imami theology developed its rationalistic inclination. The earliest comprehensive collections of Imami traditions, which were first transmitted in Kufa and other parts of Iraq, were compiled in the Iranian city of Qom. By the late ninth century CE, when the development of Imami tradition was well under way, Qom had already served for more than a century as a center for Imami Shiite learning. The earliest and most authoritative of the Imami Hadith collections consist of four canonical compendia that deal with the subjects of theology and jurisprudence.

Shiite influences spread more widely to Iran and Central Asia after the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century CE, creating a more favorable milieu in many formerly Sunni regions. A particularly broadly based Shiite tradition flowered in post-Mongol Central Asia, Iran, and Anatolia that in time would culminate in Safavid Shi'ism (ca. fifteenth century CE). Safavid Shi'ism has been characterized as "*Tariqa* Shi'ism," as it was transmitted mainly through Sufi *tariqa*s or orders that encouraged Shiite doctrines. These Sufi orders remained outwardly Sunni, following one or another of the Sunni schools of law, while being particularly devoted to 'Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt. Among the Sufi orders that played a leading role in spreading this type of popular Shi'ism, mention should be made of the Nurbakhshiyya and the Ni'matullahiyya. In the atmosphere of religious eclecticism that prevailed in Central Asia, 'Alid loyalism became more widespread, and Shiite elements began to be integrated into the broader practices of Sufi groups. It was under such circumstances that close relations developed between Twelver Shi'ism and Sufism as well as between Ismailism and Sufism in Iran. The most important Twelver Shiite mystic of the fourteenth century, who developed his own rapport between Imami Shi'ism and Sufism, was Sayyid Haydar Amuli (d. 1385 CE) who was influenced by the Sufi teachings of the Spanish Muslim mystic Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240 CE).

Among the Sufi orders that contributed to the spread of Shi'ism in predominantly Sunni Iran, the most important was the Safavi order, founded by Shaykh Safi al-Din (d. 1334 CE), a Sunni who practiced Shafi'i jurisprudence. The Safavi order spread rapidly throughout Azerbaijan, eastern Anatolia, and other regions, acquiring influence over a number of Turkoman tribes. Under Shaykh Safi's fourth successor, Shaykh Junayd (d. 1460 CE), the order was transformed into an active military movement. Shaykh Junayd was the first Safavid spiritual leader to espouse specifically Shiite sentiments. Junayd's son and successor, Shaykh Haydar (d. 1488 CE), was responsible for instructing his soldier-Sufi followers to adopt the scarlet headgear of 12 gores commemorating the 12 Imams, for which they became known as the *Qizilbash,* a Turkish term meaning "red-head."

The Shi'ism of the Qizilbash Turkomans became more clearly manifest when the youthful Isma'il became the leader of the Safavi order. Isma'il presented himself to his followers as the representative of the hidden twelfth Imam. With the help of his Qizilbash forces, he speedily seized Azerbaijan and entered its capital, Tabriz, in 1501. He then proclaimed himself *Shah* or king and at the same time declared Twelver Shi'ism to be the official religion of the newly founded Safavid state. Shah Isma'il brought all of Iran under his control during the ensuing decade. The Safavid dynasty ruled Iran until 1722 CE.

In order to enhance their legitimacy, Shah Isma'il and his immediate successors claimed to represent the Mahdi, or Hidden Imam. They also claimed 'Alid origins for their dynasty, tracing their ancestry to Imam Musa al-Kazim. Shi'ism became the established religion of the Safavid state gradually. Under Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–1524 CE) and his son Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576 CE), the Safavids articulated a religious policy that in partnership with Imami scholars actively propagated Twelver Shi'ism. However, as Iran did not have an established class of Shiite religious scholars at that time, the Safavids were obliged to invite scholars from the Arab centers of Imami scholarship, notably Najaf, Bahrain, and Jabal Amil, to instruct their subjects. The foremost of these Arab Shiite scholars was Shaykh 'Ali al-Karaki al-Amili (d. 1534 CE), also known as al-Muhaqqiq al-Thani (The Second Authority).

Under the influence of Amili and others, the Safavids encouraged the training of a class of Imami legal scholars to teach the established doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism. During the reign of Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1587–1629 CE), Imami rituals and popular practices were established, such as pilgrimage visits (*ziyara*) to the tombs of the Imams and their relatives in Najaf, Karbala, and other shrine cities of Iraq, as well as in Mashhad and Qom in Iran. The training of Imami scholars was further facilitated through the foundation of religious colleges in Isfahan, the Safavid capital. By the end of the seventeenth century CE, an influential class of Shiite religious scholars had developed in the Safavid state.

The Safavid period witnessed a renaissance of Muslim sciences and scholarship. Foremost among the intellectual achievements of the period were the original contributions of Shiite scholars that belonged to the so-called School of Isfahan. These scholars integrated the philosophical, theological, and mystical traditions of Shi'ism into a metaphysical synthesis known as Divine Wisdom or theosophy (Persian, *hikmat-i ilahi*). The founder of the Shiite theosophical school was Muhammad Baqir Astarabadi (d. 1630 CE), also known as Mir Damad, a Shiite theologian, philosopher, and poet, who served as the chief religious authority (*Shaykh al-Islam*) of Isfahan. The most important representative of the School of Isfahan was Mir Damad's principal student, Sadr al-Din Muhammad Shirazi (d. 1640 CE), better known as Mulla Sadra. Mulla Sadra produced his own synthesis of Muslim thought, including theology, peripatetic philosophy, philosophical mysticism, and Sufi studies, particularly the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabi. Mulla Sadra trained eminent students, such as Mulla Muhsin Kashani (d. 1680 CE) and 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji (d. 1661 CE), who passed down the traditions of the School of Isfahan in later centuries in both Iran and India.

The Imami scholars, especially the jurists among them, played an increasingly prominent role in the affairs of the Safavid state. This trend reached its climax with Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1699 CE), who was the leading Twelver Shiite scholar and authority of the time. He is best known for compiling the encyclopedic collection of Shiite Hadith known as *Bihar al-anwar* (Seas of Light). Many of the Twelver scholars disagreed among themselves on theological and juristic issues and divided into two camps, generally designated as the *Akhbari* (the traditionalist school) and the *Usuli* (the rationalist school). Mulla Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1624 CE), one of the most influential Akhbari scholars, attacked the very idea of *ijtihad* in Islamic jurisprudence and branded the Usuli scholars enemies of the religion. Criticizing earlier innovations in *usul al-fiqh,* the principles of jurisprudence, Astarabadi recognized the *akhbar,* the traditions of the Imams, as the most important source of Islamic law and as the only valid resource for the correct understanding of the Qur'an and the way of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Akhbari school of Twelver Shi'ism flourished for almost two centuries in Iran and the shrine cities of Iraq. In the second half of the eighteenth century, when Twelver Shi'ism was already widespread in Iran, the Usuli doctrine found a new champion in Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani (d. 1793 CE), who defended the *ijtihad* of the jurists and successfully led the intellectual debate against the Akhbaris. Thereafter, the Akhbaris rapidly lost their position to the Usulis, who now emerged as the prevailing scholars of jurisprudence in Imami Shi'ism. The reestablishment of the Usuli school led to an unprecedented enhancement of the authority of the legal scholars under the Qajar dynasty of Iran (r. 1794–1925). This enhancement of scholarly status placed the practice of *taqlid,* the imitation of a noted jurist, at the center of Imami jurisprudence.

Meanwhile, Imami Shi'ism had also spread to southern Lebanon and certain regions of India. Twelver legal scholars, who were often of Persian origin, were particularly active in India. The Adil-Shahis of Bijapur (r. 1490–1686 CE) were the first Muslim dynasty in India to adopt Imami Shi'ism as the religious doctrine of their state. Sultan Quli (r. 1496–1543 CE), the founder of the Qutb-Shahi dynasty of Golconda, also adopted Imami Shi'ism. In India, the Imami *ulama* encountered the hostility of the Sunnis. Nur Allah Shushtari, an eminent Twelver theologian-jurist who emigrated from Iran to India and enjoyed some popularity at the Mughal court, was executed in 1610 CE at the instigation of the Sunni scholars. Despite such persecution, Shiite communities survived even in the Mughal empire, especially in the region of Hyderabad. Twelver Shi'ism also spread to northern India and was adopted in the kingdom of Awadh (1722–1856) with its capital at Lucknow.

Developments in the Modern Period

The modern period of Imami Shi'ism has been marked by two major influences. The first has been the expanding role and impact of European conquest and colonization in many parts of the Muslim world. The second has been the emergence of the modern nation–state as a means of uniting people with a common allegiance to territory and collective identity. While Iran was never directly conquered and ruled by European powers, it was deeply affected by the contested claims of territorial domination by various European states, in particular Russia, France, and Britain, all of which sought to cultivate a zone of influence in the region.

One aspect of the response to European encroachment involved the modernization of armies, the appropriation of technology and industry, and the gradual absorption of different systems of education and constitutional reforms. Changes took place unevenly in urban and rural areas, among various groups, and even within individual states. In general, traditional patterns of religious and educational life continued or even intensified in response to perceived alien influences. In places where the Twelver Shiite population was dominant, namely Iran and Iraq, different patterns of response to change emerged. In Iran, the religious scholars played an important role in helping the Qajar rulers resist Russian imperial designs and protested strongly against the granting of concessions by the state to foreign powers. A far more important debate also arose over the acceptance of constitutional ideas from Europe and their adaptation to the traditionally ruled Muslim state.

Shiite scholars, particularly Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Na'ini (d. 1936), argued strongly for the compatibility of constitutional ideas and Twelver traditions. In Iran, this led to a series of dramatic changes. Between 1905 and

1911, there took place a constitutional revolution, aimed at reframing the rules of governance and limiting the role of the absolute Qajar monarchs. However, this political experiment failed, and following short periods of British control, power in Iran was seized in 1921 by an army colonel, Reza Khan, who soon deposed the Qajar dynasty and declared himself Shah. Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–1941) instituted a series of reforms of a secular nature that greatly curtailed the role and influence of religious scholars and the Twelver establishment in Iran. His son and successor, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (r. 1941–1979), continued the general policies of his father. In the 1950s, a strong secular nationalist movement led by Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh gained strength. This movement was thwarted with the help of the American Central Intelligence Agency, and the position of the Shah came to be consolidated even further. Many leading religious scholars were moved to intensify debate on the issues of the time at the various centers of Shiite learning. Among them were Allama Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (d. 1981) and Murtaza Mutahhari (d. 1979). A number of religious leaders came to be regarded as successors to the great Ayatollah Burujirdi (d. 1961), to whom the title of *Marja'-i Taqlid* (Source of Imitation) had been given by his peers.

Meanwhile in Iraq, the Shiite religious leaders played an unsuccessful role in resisting British rule after World War I, although in conjunction with scholars from Iran they engaged actively in debating the issues of the day. Eventually, the Middle East was divided into several spheres of influence and Iraq came to be governed under a British mandate, which led to the appointment of King Faisal I (r. 1921–1933) as ruler of an independent Iraq. In 1958, there was a coup by army officers, leading to the execution of King Faisal II and a sustained period of instability. Subsequently, another military dictatorship was established in Iraq by Saddam Hussein, during whose long rule all religious opposition was brutally suppressed.

During the 1960s, a lesser known but politically active Iranian religious scholar named Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called for the abolition of the monarchy in Iran. He was sent into exile in Iraq, where he continued his opposition to the Iranian regime. There were also other intellectuals, not directly linked to the religious authorities, who challenged the status quo in Iran. These nonclerical intellectuals helped marshal the resources that brought Twelver Shi'ism into dialogue with contemporary ideologies. The most famous of these intellectuals, 'Ali Shariati (d. 1977), catalyzed student and youth opposition through his writings and lectures. Traditionally trained scholars, such as Murtaza Mutahhari, also added their voices to the mounting opposition. However, Khomeini marshaled the forces of opposition to the Shah most successfully. Khomeini's leadership led to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the abolition of the Pahlavi monarchy, and the inauguration of the Islamic Republic of Iran. After the revolution, a constitutional structure emerged in Iran that institutionalized the role of the Twelver scholars as

representatives of the Hidden Imam and guardians of the state. An institutionalized ideology, *vilayat-i faqih* (the authority of the jurist), was written into the Iranian constitution. This ideology established a leading role for the supreme religious leader in the affairs of the state, while also allowing for an elected legislative body, the *majlis* or parliament, and an elected president. After Khomeini's death in 1989, the role of the supreme leader has been assumed by Ayatollah ʻAli Khamenei.

In Iran, Iraq, and parts of Lebanon, recent political developments continue to be influential in discussions and debates about the Twelver Shiite heritage. Imami Shiite communities, meanwhile, have continued to thrive in many other regions. In addition to Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and India, there are Twelver Shiite communities in parts of Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.

Doctrines and Practices of Twelver Shiʻism

For all Shiʻa, the period up to the death of Imam Jaʻfar al-Sadiq constitutes a shared legacy. During this period, the Shiʻa preserved the traditions of the Prophet and the early Imams, began the development of a tradition of legal thought, and laid the foundations of what in due course represented a strong tradition of philosophical and esoteric interpretation of Islam. "I am the city of knowledge and ʻAli is its gate; so whoever desires knowledge, let him enter the gate." This *hadith*, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, highlights the complementarity of roles envisaged in Shiʻism. Reference has already been made to ʻAli's intimate engagement with the mission of the Prophet and his active role in the cause of Islam. This engagement is highlighted by Shiite sources to affirm ʻAli's key role in the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an, a commitment to the application of reason in matters of faith, an emphasis on ethical conduct and social justice, the importance of a personal search for knowledge, and the cultivation of an inner life in communion with God. Many of ʻAli's teachings were preserved in a work titled *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Way of Eloquence), which highlights his foundational role in inspiring Shiite intellectual and spiritual traditions. In this context, the Imam has a pivotal role in Shiite Islam, linking revelation to daily human life and giving expression to practical forms in society by which the ethical ideals of Shiʻism can be realized.

The ideal of social justice and its defense is evoked in Shiite sources, with particular reference to the life of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet. For resisting the tyrannical rule of the second Umayyad Caliph Yazid, Imam Husayn and his followers were massacred at Karbala, in present-day Iraq. This event, commemorated during the first 10 days of the month of Muharram in the Muslim calendar, has central significance in Imami Shiite spirituality. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn, who is called

Sayyid al-Shuhada' or "Lord of the Martyrs," not only catalyzed the opponents to Umayyad rule but also provided a focus for Shiite religious expression, strengthening loyalty around the Ahl al-Bayt and their cause of restoring a pious society among the Muslims. Both Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far al-Sadiq, the fifth and sixth Imams, respectively, consolidated the position of the Shi'a and elaborated the intellectual basis of the interpretation and practice of Shiite Islam outside of the existing political order. They also acted as important reference points for the ongoing development of Shiite spirituality and religious rituals.

A distinctive aspect of Shiite theological and legal traditions, compared to those of the Sunnis, was the elevation of reason and the use of Hadith transmitted through their Imams. The Imamis or Twelvers, like all Shi'a, regard independent reasoning, *ijtihad,* as a significant tool in jurisprudential thought. In theology, this principle allowed Twelver Shiites to give rational principles a wide scope in the intellectual tradition. In the absence of the Imam, *ijtihad* could only be exercised by competent and qualified religious scholars. Such individuals, called *mujtahids,* became the major source of authoritative guidance on daily issues facing believers. These scholars received their training in centers where religious learning was preserved and transmitted. Known as *madrasa*s, these traditional centers of learning developed in key centers where the Imami Shiite community was strong. In addition to centers in Iraq, such as in Najaf and Karbala, there were also important institutions of religious learning in Iran—in Qom, Mashhad, and Isfahan—and subsequently in the Indian subcontinent. These centers trained scholars and jurists to educate and serve the Shiite community and created important networks for the preservation and continuity of Twelver Shiite learning.

While all Shi'a share the core practices of Islam with other Muslim communities, distinctive ceremonies and traditions have evolved in Shiite Islam, grounded in Shi'ism's particular set of experiences and interpretations. In addition to the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and visiting the Prophet's tomb in Medina, Imami Shiites regard it as important to visit the tombs of the Imams and their descendants, who in Persian are known as *Imamzadehs.* The most important of these tombs are in Najaf (the burial place of Imam 'Ali), Karbala (the burial place of Imam Husayn), al-Kazimayn in Baghdad (the tomb of the fifth and ninth Imams), Mashhad (Imam al-Rida), and Samarra (the tomb of the tenth and eleventh Imams), which is also where the twelfth Imam went into occultation. Another popular site of pilgrimage is Qom, where the sister of the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rida is buried. There are also holy sites in Cairo (believed to be the place where Imam Husayn's head was kept) and Damascus (associated with Zaynab, the sister of Imam Husayn).

The commemoration of Imam Husayn's martyrdom is of particular significance and is remembered during the month of Muharram through

processions in which intense grief is displayed. At *majalis,* sessions devoted to the commemoration of the martyrdom of Husayn, preachers recount the events of his death in sermons known as *rawda-khani,* and prayers are offered. Believers also reenact the tragedy of Husayn and chant poems, often through elaborate dramatic performances called *ta'ziyeh.* The events of Karbala are commemorated globally, wherever Twelver Shiite communities can be found, and are enriched by local tradition and poetry. The gathering places at which such events take place are known as *Husayniyyas* or *Imambaras,* which consist of extensive, decorated structures adorned with images that recall the tragedy.

ISMAILI SHI'ISM

After Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's death in the eighth century CE, those of his followers who were loyal to his eldest son Isma'il and his descendants struggled to keep their hopes alive. The descendants of Isma'il, the eponym of the Ismaili Shiites, lived in very hazardous circumstances in various secret localities. By the middle of the ninth century CE, they had settled in Salamiyya in Syria. During this period, they concealed their identity from the public and sought to consolidate and organize the widely dispersed Ismaili community. The scholars and local leaders of the Ismailis, known as *da'is* or "Summoners," maintained contact with the Imams and organized themselves into a *da'wa,* a network of shared commitment to the Imam and intellectual values. When they emerged into the public limelight at the beginning of the tenth century, the Ismaili community was remarkably well organized and cohesive. This community relied on a missionary network of dedicated leaders or *da'is* (literally, "those who summon"), who conveyed the teachings of the Ismaili Imams effectively and with great intellectual competence.

The Ismaili *da'is* sought to extend their influence and forge alliances to create the foundations of a possible state under the rule of the Imam. The opportunity of laying the foundations for a state gained momentum at the beginning of the tenth century CE, when the Ismaili Imam of the time, 'Abdallah, moved from Syria to North Africa. In 910 CE, he was proclaimed *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Believers), with the title of *al-Mahdi* ("The Guided One," equivalent to the idea of "The Saviour"). The dynasty of the Ismaili Imams, who for more than two centuries reigned over an extensive empire centered in Egypt, adopted the title of *al-Fatimiyyun* (commonly rendered as Fatimids) after Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter and wife of 'Ali, from whom the Imams were descended. The proclamation of Imam 'Abdallah al-Mahdi as the first Fatimid Caliph marked the beginning of the Ismaili attempt to give a concrete shape to their vision of Shiite Islam.

From their initial base in the present-day country of Tunisia, the Fatimids expanded their realm of influence and authority, advancing to Egypt during the reign of the fourth Fatimid Imam and Caliph al-Mu'izz. In 973 CE, al-Mu'izz transferred the Fatimid capital from North Africa to the new city of *al-Qahira* (Cairo), which was founded by the Fatimids in 969 CE. Henceforth, Cairo became the centre of a far-flung empire, which at its peak, extended westward to North Africa, Sicily, and other Mediterranean locations, and eastward to Palestine, Syria, the Yemen, and the Hijaz with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Fatimid territories participated vigorously in international trade with North Africa, Nubia, the Middle East, Europe, Byzantium (Constantinople in particular), the islands of the Mediterranean, and India. Agriculture advanced to a level of general self-sufficiency; industry received active stimulus from the state and helped boost both inland and maritime trade.

It was, however, in the sphere of intellectual life that the Fatimid achievement seems most brilliant and outstanding. The Fatimid rulers were lavish patrons of learning. Their encouragement of scientific research and cultural pursuits attracted the finest minds of the age to the Caliphal court in Cairo, regardless of religious persuasion. Such luminaries included mathematicians and physicists, astronomers, physicians, historians, geographers, and poets. Al-Azhar, the chief Cairo mosque built by the Imam and Caliph al-Mu'izz and endowed by his successors, also became a great center of learning. The *Dar al-'Ilm* (House of Knowledge), which was established in Cairo in 1005 CE by the Imam and Caliph al-Hakim (r. 996–1021CE), became famous as a leading institution of learning. Its program of studies combined a range of major academic disciplines, from the study of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions to jurisprudence, philology and grammar, medicine, logic, mathematics, and astronomy. This institution, with its library of over 400,000 manuscripts, was open to followers of different religions. The impact of this cultural and intellectual flowering was not limited to the Muslim world. The influence of the academic institutions of Cairo and other centers of Ismaili scholarship spread into Europe, contributing significantly to the development of scientific thought and philosophy in the West.

Ismaili intellectuals of outstanding ability, such as Abu Hatim al-Razi, Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, al-Qadi al-Nu'man, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi, and Nasir-i Khusraw, made significant contributions to the articulation of Muslim thought and to Shiite literature. They wrote extensively, employing the philosophical tools of the age, to promote a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of *tawhid* (unity of God), prophecy, and the Imamate on the basis of general Islamic and Shiite principles. Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 1072 CE), the well-known poet-philosopher who spread Ismaili Shi'ism in Central Asia, sought to demonstrate the relationship between philosophy and prophetic wisdom, stressing the indispensability of prophetic wisdom for the development of human intellect. In the

same vein, Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124 CE), the founder of an Ismaili state based at the fortress of Alamut in Iran, expounded afresh the early Shiite doctrine of *ta'lim* (literally, "education"), the need of humankind for revelational guidance as interpreted by each Imam of the age.

The founding of the Fatimid Caliphate also provided the first opportunity for the promulgation of Ismaili Shiite jurisprudential principles. The Ismaili exposition of these principles was based on Imam 'Ali's teachings, which had been the inspiration for the doctrinal elaborations by Imams Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far al-Sadiq. In light of these teachings, the Fatimid law was formulated and implemented, above all, with due deference to their universalistic philosophy of religious tolerance and respect for difference. The spirit of Fatimid state policy was succinctly inscribed in one of their edicts: "Each Muslim may try to find his own solution within his religion." In the same spirit, the Fatimids encouraged the private patronage of mosques and other pious endowments by Muslims of different legal schools, their policy reflecting the historical fact of a plurality of pious ways rather than a monolithic interpretation of religion. For appointments in the Fatimid judiciary, as in other branches of government, merit was a primary criterion. In elevating a Sunni jurist to the position of Chief *qadi* or judge, the Imam and Caliph al-Hakim, for example, praised the appointee's sense of justice and intellectual caliber as determining factors. The period of Fatimid rule is also noteworthy for the support and encouragement given to Christians and Jews within the state. Many Coptic and Armenian Christians as well as Jews attained important positions, and the two communities participated actively in the social, cultural, intellectual, and economic life of the larger society. The Fatimids founded this encouragement on the Qur'anic principle of respect for the *Ahl al-Kitab,* the People of the Book, which were the Christian and Jewish communities.

In the last decade of the eleventh century CE, the Ismaili community suffered a permanent schism over the question of succession to the Imam and Caliph al-Mustansir Bi'llah, who died in 1094 CE. One section of the community recognized his younger son al-Musta'li, who had succeeded to the Fatimid Caliphate as the next Imam. The other faction supported al-Mustansir's elder son and designated heir, Nizar, as the Imam. The Nizari Ismaili Imams of modern times, known under their hereditary title of the Aga Khan, trace their descent to Nizar. Today, the two Ismaili branches are the Musta'li and Nizari, named after al-Mustansir's sons who claimed his heritage.

The Nizari Ismailis

The seat of the Nizari Imamate moved to Iran, where the Ismailis had already succeeded, under the leadership of Hasan-i Sabbah, in establishing

a state comprising a network of fortified settlements. With its headquarters at Alamut, in northern Iran, the Nizari state later extended to parts of Syria. Although there were continual wars among Muslims over issues of power and territory, this period of Muslim history does not paint a simple canvas of one camp fighting another. The military situation was further complicated by the presence of the Crusaders, who were in contact with the Nizari Ismailis of Syria. Shifting alliances among all these different groups was the normal order of the times.

It was within this context of debilitating warfare among Muslims and the rising Mongol threat to the Muslim world that the Nizari Ismaili Imam Jalal al-Din Hasan (r. 1210–1221 CE), who ruled from Alamut, embarked on a policy of rapprochement with Sunni rulers and jurists. The Sunnis reciprocated positively, and the Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir acknowledged the legitimacy of the Ismaili Imam's rule over a territorial state. Imam Jalal al-Din's policy, like that of his Fatimid forebears, was a practical affirmation that while differences in the interpretation of sacred texts exist among Muslims, what matters most are the overarching principles that unite them all. In these trying times of struggle, military encounters, and changing alliances, the Ismailis of the Alamut state did not forsake their intellectual and literary traditions. Their fortresses housed impressive libraries with collections of books on various religious subjects and included philosophical and scientific tracts as well as scientific equipment. Nor did the hostile environment force the Nizari Ismailis to abandon their liberal policy of patronage to men of learning, which benefited Muslim as well a non-Muslim scholars and scientists. Their settlements in Iran also served as sanctuaries for waves of refugees, irrespective of creed, who fled both local conflicts and the Mongol onslaught. Alamut finally fell to the Mongols in 1256 CE. Subsequently, many Nizari Ismailis found refuge in Afghanistan, Transoxania in Central Asia, China, and the Indian subcontinent, where large Ismaili settlements had existed since the ninth century CE.

The Ismailis who remained in Iran had to protect their identity to escape persecution. Given the esoteric nature of their tradition, Sufi orders often provided hospitality to the Ismailis. Though the Sufi orders then prevalent in the Iranian lands were predominantly Sunni, all of them held ʻAli ibn Abi Talib in high esteem. During this difficult phase, the institution of the Ismaili Imamate retained its resilience. In the fourteenth century, under the influence of the Nizari Imams, new centers of Nizari activity were established in the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, the mountainous regions of Hindukush, Central Asia, and parts of China. In South Asia, the Nizari Ismailis became known as *Khojas,* and they developed a distinctive devotional literature known as the *Ginan*s.

Developments in the Modern Period

The modern Nizari Ismaili community has a global presence. Historically, the community reflected a wide geographical and ethnographic diversity based on the various cultural regions of the world where its members originated and lived. Today, the Ismaili heritage includes the cultures of Central Asia, Persia, the Arab Middle East, and South Asia. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many Ismailis from South Asia migrated to Africa and settled there. In more recent times, there has been migration from all parts of the Ismaili world to North America and Europe. The shared values that unite Ismailis are centered on their allegiance to a living Imam. At present, this is the 49th hereditary Imam and descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, Prince Karim Aga Khan. The authority and guidance of the Imam provides the enabling framework for the development of the Ismaili community and for the continuity of its Muslim heritage.

The modern phase of Nizari Ismaili history, as with other Muslims, can be dated to the nineteenth century and to the significant historical changes arising from the growth and enlargement of European presence and power in the Muslim world. Following a period of change and turmoil in Iran during the 1840s, the 46th Imam, Hasan ʻAli Shah, went to India. He was the first Nizari Imam to bear the title of Aga Khan, which was granted to him by the Persian monarch Fath ʻAli Shah Qajar. His leadership enabled the community in India to lay the foundations for institutional and social developments and also fostered more regular contacts with Ismaili communities in other parts of the world. After his death in 1881 he was succeeded by his son ʻAli Shah, Aga Khan II, who continued to build on the institutions created by his father, with a particular emphasis on providing modern education for the community. He also played an important role representing Muslims in the emerging political institutions under British rule in India. Following his early death in 1885, Aga Khan II was succeeded by his eight-year-old son, Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III. Aga Khan III was Imam for 72 years, the longest in Ismaili history, and his life spanned dramatic political, social, and economic transformations. His long-term involvement in international affairs, his advocacy of Muslim interests in troubled times, and his commitment to the advancement of education, particularly for Muslim women, reflect his significant and generous contributions. It was his leadership as Imam, however, that transformed the modern history of the Nizari Ismailis, enabling them to adapt successfully to the challenges of the twentieth century.

In South Asia and Africa, the Nizari Ismailis established administrative structures, educational institutions, and health services and built on economic opportunities in trade and industry. In 1905, the Nizari Ismaili community in East Africa adopted a constitution, which laid the basis for an

organized framework of institutions and governance at local, regional, and national levels. Similar constitutions were created for other Ismaili communities and were revised periodically, providing guidance for the conduct of personal law and its place within the context of the laws of each country in which the Ismailis resided. In 1986, the present Imam, Prince Karim Aga Khan, extended this practice to the worldwide Nizari Ismaili community. The revised Ismaili constitution, which serves the social governance needs of all Nizari Ismailis, facilitates a unified approach to internal organization and external relations, while taking account of regional diversity and local differences. As in the past, Ismailis follow a strong tradition of voluntary service, contributions, and donations of time, expertise, and personal resources to the Imam and communal institutions.

The present Nizari Imam assumed his post in 1957, at a time when much of the developing world, including the Muslim world, was going through an important period of transition, often marked by political change and upheaval. These continued throughout the twentieth century, making it particularly vital that the Ismailis were guided appropriately through periods of crises and tumultuous changes, as in East Africa and the subcontinent, and later in Tajikistan, Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan. Social and political dislocation often meant that humanitarian concerns for the rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees took priority, and a significant number of Ismailis emigrated to Britain, other European countries, Canada, and the United States.

While the internal institutional organizations of the Nizari Ismaili community continued to be strengthened and reorganized to respond to changing conditions, the Imam also created new institutions to better serve the complex development needs of the community and the societies in which his followers lived. This gave rise to the establishment of the AKDN (Aga Khan Development Network), with the goal of creating strategies for sustainable human development conducive to the fulfilment of the cultural, economic, social, and spiritual aspirations of individuals and communities. A number of institutions within the AKDN pursue a variety of programs in economic development, education, social development, culture, and the environment across the world, in both rural and urban settings, with a particular emphasis on disadvantaged populations.

Doctrines and Practices

The essence of Shi'ism lies in the search for the true meaning of revelation in order to understand the purpose of life and human destiny. By virtue of the authority (*walaya*) invested in Imam 'Ali by the Prophet, each Imam of the time is the inheritor of the Prophet's authority, the trustee of his legacy, and the guardian of the Qur'an. The role of the Imam in guiding the path

to spiritual self-realization conveys the essence of the relationship between the Imam and his follower (*murid*), symbolized in the traditional pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) that each *murid* makes to the Imam of the time. The replacement of the line of prophecy with that of Imamate, therefore, ensures the balance between the *Shari'a,* the exoteric aspect of the faith, and the *Haqiqa,* its esoteric, spiritual essence. Neither the exoteric (*zahir*) nor the esoteric (*batin*) aspect of the religion obliterates the other. The Imam is the path to the believer's inward, spiritual elevation and is the religious authority that makes the *Shari'a* relevant according to the needs of the time. This emphasis on an inner, spiritual life in harmony with the exoteric performance of the *Shari'a* is an aspect of the faith that finds acceptance among many communities in both branches of Islam, whether Shiite or Sunni.

The Imamate thus enables believers to go beyond the apparent or outward form of the revelation in their search for its inner spirituality and meaning. Under the guidance of each Nizari Imam, the meaning of the Qur'an unfolds afresh in each age. The ultimate Shiite expectation is not a new revelation but the complete understanding of the spiritual meaning of the final revelation granted to the Prophet Muhammad. This constitutes the Shiite notion of Islam's spiritual dynamism through the line of Imams, whose main role is to foster continuing submission to the Divine Command. This principle ensures the ever-continuing vitality of the *Shari'a,* the normative law, and the practices derived from it. These practices are the foundation of Ja'fari–Imami Shiite jurisprudence, as elaborated by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, who is accepted by both Imami and Ismaili Shiite Muslims as their Imam. Both communities, accordingly, subscribe to the fundamentals of Islam and its core practices. They accept the Holy Qur'an, correctly interpreted, as the source of guidance for all time. They respect the *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad as reported via the 'Alid Imams, in addition to the norms specified by the Imams themselves. They reserve the right of interpretation of the Qur'an to the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet. As a religious principle, they place obedience to the Imams immediately after obedience to God and the Prophet. This belief is derived from the command in the Qur'an that Muslims obey God and the Prophet and refer their disputes to those vested with authority. When in doubt about the correct course to follow, they are to submit to the Imam's judgment. The Imams are the People of Remembrance (*Ahl al-Dhikr*), endowed with the competent knowledge of the revealed message.

Shiites perform their congregational prayers in mosques, to which all Muslims go. In addition to the practices prescribed by the *Shari'a,* the Nizari Ismailis observe their own distinctive practices such as supplicatory and intercessionary prayers (*du'a*), meditative sessions of remembrance (*dhikr*), and the recitation of devotional poetry. Such practices usually take place in Ismaili *Jamatkhanas* (literally, "assembly-houses"). Ismaili assembly-houses are designated by the Imam of the time for the use of *murids* who have given the

bay'a, the oath of allegiance, and whose *bay'a* the Imam has accepted. As an integral part of the religious landscape of the Muslim world, *Jamatkhanas* are part of an institutional category that serves a number of Shiite and Sunni communities in their respective contexts. For many centuries, a prominent feature of the religious landscape of Islam has been gathering spaces that coexist in harmony with the mosque. Historically serving communities of different interpretations and spiritual affiliations, these spaces range from the *ribat, tekke,* and *zawiya* of the Sufis to the *Husayniyya* and *Jamatkhana* of the Shi'a.

The practices of the Nizari Ismailis have evolved over many centuries in a multiplicity of cultural milieus, stretching from North Africa and the Middle East, through Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and China, to South Asia. The resulting diversity of these practices corresponds to the multiple cultural, linguistic, and literary traditions of the Nizari Ismailis, which reflects the pluralism of the Muslim *Umma* within the fundamental unity of Islam. This unity among Muslims is evident, for example, in their common practices derived from the *Shari'a* and common festivals, such as *'Id al-Fitr* (the feast of fast-breaking at the end of Ramadan) and *Milad al-Nabi* (the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), which are celebrated by Muslims of all persuasions. In addition, Shiite Muslims gather specifically for Shiite festivals such as *'Id al-Ghadir,* the commemoration of Ghadir al-Khumm, where the Prophet designated 'Ali as his successor. This unity among Muslims has historically coexisted with the right of each school of Islamic thought to practice its particular interpretation of the central tenets of Islam.

The Musta'li Ismailis

The Musta'li Ismailis share with the Nizari Ismailis a common Fatimid heritage, although they no longer have an Imam who is present in their community. Instead, they take guidance from the leadership of the *Da'i Mutlaq* (Supreme Authority), the representative of the concealed Imam, to maintain the intellectual and legal traditions of their daily life. The Musta'li Imams themselves have remained in concealment since 1130 CE. In their absence, supreme authorities known as Da'i Mutlaq have led their community. For all practical purposes, the *Da'i* is a substitute for the hidden Musta'li Imam. As in the case of Imams, the Musta'li *Da'is* appoint their successors. From the twelfth century onwards, the Musta'li Ismailis were based primarily in Yemen and later to an increasing extent in India, where they became known as Bohras. After 1589 CE, the community became divided into Daudi and Sulaymani branches over allegiance to different individuals as *Da'i Mutlaq*. There are no significant differences between the doctrines of the two branches of Musta'li Ismailism. The present *Da'i* of the majoritarian group, the Tayyibi Daudis, is Sayyidna Muhammad Burhan al-Din, the 52nd in the

series. He lives in Mumbai (Bombay), where the leadership has moved from its earlier headquarters in Gujarat. The Daudis are found mostly in South Asia, to a lesser extend in Yemen, and in small immigrant communities in Britain, North America, and Sri Lanka. The other Musta'li group, the Sulaymanis, recognize 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad al-Makrami as the 51st *Da'i*, with his headquarters in Yemen. Following the annexation of the province of Najran from the Yemen to Saudi Arabia in 1934, a smaller community of Sulaymanis is also to be found there with a much smaller number in India.

Since 1817, the office of *Da'i Mutlaq* of the Daudis has remained in the progeny of Shaykh Jiwanji Awrangabadi. Two recent *Da'is* have played important roles in the modern Tayyibi Daudi community. Sayyidna Tahir Sayf al-Din became leader in 1915 and was succeeded in 1965 by his son, the present *Da'i* Sayyidna Muhammad Burhan al-Din (b. 1915). Sayyidna Muhammad has continued to emphasize the strong tradition of learning in the Daudi community. This is reflected in the development of two major libraries in the Indian cities Mumbai and Surat and the enlargement of their main seminary, Jami'a Sayfiyya, in Surat, an academy of learning and training for religious scholars and functionaries of the community. There are well-established *madrasas* for the religious education of all Daudi Bohras as well as schools for secular education. The tradition of retaining the heritage of learning through manuscript study has been well preserved, and scholarly and literary works, primarily in Arabic, continue to be developed within the community. The Musta'li Ismailis, both Daudi and Sulaymani, have preserved a significant portion of the Arabic literature of the Ismailis of earlier times.

The Daudi community is organized under the leadership of the *Da'i*, with its headquarters in Mumbai. A representative, known as *Shaykh* or *'Amil*, leads the local community and organizes its religious and social life, including the maintenance of places for religious worship and ritual, as well as communal buildings. Every Daudi, on attaining the age of 15, is obliged to take an oath of allegiance (*mithaq*) to the Imams and *Da'is*. The majority of Ismaili Bohras are in business and industry and have a well-deserved reputation for entrepreneurship and public service. They also run many charitable organizations for the welfare of their communities worldwide.

The Sulaymani community is of predominantly Arab origin and lives mostly in Yemen. It is found in both urban and rural areas, with strong tribal roots. The Sulaymani community of Najran in Saudi Arabia has often found it difficult to practice its faith openly and freely because of pressure from the official Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia. The much smaller Sulaymani community in India has produced noted public officials and scholars. There are certain differences between the traditions and the social practices of the Arabic-speaking Yemeni Sulaymanis and the Daudis of South Asia, who use a form of the Gujarati written in Arabic script. The Daudi Bohras have also incorporated many Hindu customs in their marriage and other ceremonies.

ZAYDI SHI'ISM

The influence and geographical distribution of the Zaydis, named after their fourth Imam Zayd ibn 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 740 CE), have been more restricted than the Twelvers and the Ismailis. In fact, after some initial success in Iraq, Zaydi Shi'ism remained confined to the Caspian region, northern Iran, and most importantly in Yemen, where Zaydi communities have continued to exist to the present.

The Zaydi branch of Shi'ism developed out of Zayd ibn 'Ali's abortive revolt in Kufa in 740 CE. The movement was initially led by Zayd's son Yahya, who escaped from Kufa to Khurasan and concentrated his activities in what is now eastern Iran and Central Asia. Yahya was eventually tracked down by the Umayyads and killed in 743 CE. In the early Abbasid period, the Zaydis were led by another of Zayd's sons, 'Isa (d. 783 CE). By the middle of the ninth century CE, the Zaydis shifted their attention away from Iraq and concentrated their activities in regions far removed from the centers of Abbasid power. These regions included Daylam, in northern Iran, and Yemen, where two Zaydi states were soon founded.

The Zaydis elaborated a doctrine of the Imamate that clearly distinguished them from the Twelver Shiites and the Ismailis. The Zaydis did not recognize a hereditary line of Imams, nor did they attach any significance to the principle of designation, *nass*. Initially, they accepted any member of the Ahl al-Bayt as a potential Imam, although later the Imams were restricted to the descendants of Hasan or Husayn. According to Zaydi doctrine, if an Imam wished to be recognized he would have to assert his claims publicly in an uprising (*khuruj*), in addition to having the required religious knowledge. Many Zaydi Imams were learned scholars and authors. In contrast to the Twelvers and the Ismailis, the Zaydis excluded underage males from the Imamate. They also rejected the eschatological idea of a concealed Mahdi and his expected return. In fact, messianic tendencies were rather weak in Zaydi Shi'ism. Because of their emphasis on active policies, the observance of *taqiyya,* the dissimulation of actual beliefs, was also alien to Zaydi teachings. However, the Zaydis developed the doctrine of *hijra,* the obligation to emigrate from a land dominated by unjust, non-Zaydi rulers.

The Zaydis were less radical than were Imami Shiites in their condemnation of the early Caliphs. They held that 'Ali had been Imam by designation of the Prophet. However, this designation was unclear and obscure, so that its intended meaning could be understood only through investigation. After Husayn ibn 'Ali, the Imamate could be claimed by any qualified descendant of Imams Hasan or Husayn who was prepared to launch an armed uprising against the illegitimate rulers and to issue a formal summons (*da'wa*) for gaining the allegiance of the people. Religious knowledge, the ability to render independent rulings (*ijtihad*), and piety were emphasized as the qualifications of the Imam. In contrast to the beliefs of the Imami Shiites, the Zaydi

Imams were not considered immune from error and sin (*ma'sum*), except for the first three Imams. The list of the Zaydi Imams has never been completely fixed, although many of them were unanimously accepted by their followers. There were, in fact, periods without any Zaydi Imam, and at times, there was more than one Imam. Because of their high requirements for religious learning, the Zaydis often backed 'Alid pretenders and rulers as summoners (*Da'is*) or Imams with restricted status, in distinction from full Imams (*sabiqun*).

By the tenth century CE, the Zaydis had adopted practically all of the principal doctrines of Mu'tazili theology, including the unconditional punishment of the unrepentant sinner—a tenet rejected by the Twelvers and the Ismailis. In law, the Zaydis initially relied on the teachings of Zayd b. 'Ali himself and other 'Alid authorities. By the end of the ninth century, however, four legal schools had emerged on the basis of the teachings of different Zaydi scholars, including Imam al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim al-Rassi (d. 860 CE), who founded a school of jurisprudence that became prevalent in the Yemen and the Caspian region. In later times, Zaydi law became greatly influenced by the Shafi'i Sunni school of jurisprudence.

In 864 CE, Hasan b. Zayd, a descendant of Imam Hasan, led the Daylamis in a revolt against the region's pro-Abbasid ruler and established the first Zaydi state in Tabaristan, in northern Iran. Subsequently, the Daylami Zaydis were divided into two rival factions, the Qasimiyya and the Nasiriyya. There was much antagonism between the two Zaydi communities of northern Iran who often supported different leaders. Matters were further complicated by ethnic differences and the close ties that existed between the Qasimiyya Zaydis and the Zaydis of Yemen. In the course of the twelfth century, the Caspian Zaydis lost much of their prominence to the Nizari Ismailis who had successfully established themselves in northern Iran with their seat at Alamut. Subsequently, the Zaydis were further weakened because of incessant factional quarrels among different pretenders. However, minor 'Alid dynasties and Zaydi communities survived in northern Iran until the sixteenth century, when the Zaydis of that region converted to Twelver Shi'ism under the Safavids. Henceforth, Zaydi Shi'ism was confined to Yemen.

In Yemen, the Zaydi Imamate was founded in 897 CE by Imam Yahya b. Husayn al-Hadi Ila'l-Haqq (d. 911 CE), a descendant of Hasan and grandson of the jurist Qasim ibn Ibrahim al-Rassi. With the help of the local tribes, he established himself in northern Yemen, which remained the stronghold of Zaydi Shi'ism in South Arabia. Al-Hadi's legal teachings provided the foundation of the Hadawiyya legal school, which became authoritative in parts of the Caspian Zaydi community while serving as the only recognized legal school in the Yemen. The descendants of Imam al-Hadi eventually quarreled among themselves and failed to be acknowledged as Imams, thus undermining Zaydi rule in the Yemen. In the eleventh century, the Yemeni Zaydis experienced further problems because of schismatic movements in their community.

The Zaydi Imamate was briefly restored in the Yemen by Ahmad b. Sulayman al-Mutawakkil (1138–1171 CE), who promoted Zaydi unity. The Zaydi Imamate prevailed in the Yemen even after the occupation of South Arabia by the Sunni Ayyubids in 1174 CE, although the power of the Imams was now considerably restricted. The Yemeni Zaydis were at times obliged to develop better relations with the Sunnis against their own doctrines. For example, Imam al-Mu'ayyad Bi'llah Yahya ibn Hamza (1328–1346 CE) praised the early Caliphs among the Companions of the Prophet as deserving equal respect to 'Ali. In later centuries, as the Zaydi Imams extended their rule to the predominantly Sunni lowlands of Yemen, the Zaydis attempted to achieve a certain doctrinal rapport with their Sunni subjects. On the other hand, the Yemeni Zaydis maintained their traditional hostility toward the Sufis, even though a Zaydi school of Sufism was founded in Yemen in the fourteenth century. The Zaydis also had prolonged conflicts with the Yemeni Ismailis and wrote numerous polemical treatises in refutation of Ismaili doctrines.

The final phase of the Zaydi Imamate in Yemen started with al-Mansur Bi'llah al-Qasim ibn Muhammad (1597–1620 CE), founder of the Qasimi dynasty of Imams who ruled over much of the Yemen until modern times. The city of San'a served as the capital of an independent Zaydi state and Imamate for more than two centuries until 1872, when Yemen became an Ottoman province for a second time. The later Qasimi-Zaydi Imams ruled over Yemen on a purely dynastic basis until 1962, although they still claimed the title of Imam.

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16

Beginning the Prayer

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

I stand facing Mecca
the house all around me
parallel with everything
hands up to my ears
the Prayer begins

Hands across chest
time-space capsule surrounds me
no god but Allah
all other forgotten
here's eternity's signature
signed through space
with severe strokes

Parallel lines on the prayer mat
past actions cast behind me
trees in linear groves
stand straight in the Prayer in
this world
bend from the
waist into
the Next

There are parallel lines
to the limits
past the
edge of the
earth are darknesses

the body stands straight then
prostrates
what does it bow to but
Absence

Absence that is
a Presence
we can't see with our bare
eyes but Know
eyes don't see Allah physically
but are themselves
proof by
pure seeing

We prostrate in parallel lines
we stand straight with
angels in the prayer line
rows of Mediterranean Cypresses
tall silhouettes against white sky
favorites of foggy graveyards

We stand with
arms at our sides
against the
beating chests of our
turmoils
eyes half-slitted
not staring

Gaze made to
fall on the
inside
last actions done
cast behind me
dead while alive
standing still
concentrated
by praying

From the
Next world we
rise into

This one

NOTE

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17

What Is Sufism?

Ahmet T. Karamustafa

Both "Sufi" and "Sufism" are terms adopted from their Arabic originals.[1] In Arabic texts dating from the first few centuries of Islam, one can find the terms *sufi* and *mutasawwif,* which refer to devotees of a particular type of piety. This mode of pious living was most commonly referred to by the name *tasawwuf,* which is the Arabic equivalent of the modern English word "Sufism." There was controversy over the origins of the term *sufi* among the authors of these early texts, and modern scholars have reproduced this controversy at different levels in their own writings. However, there is considerable agreement among both early authors and modern scholars that the word *sufi* most probably comes from *suf,* the Arabic word for "wool," and that it was originally used to designate "wearers of woolen garments."[2]

It is likely that the word *sufi* was coined as early as the eighth century CE to refer to some renunciants and ascetics who wore wool as a sign of their renunciation of this world as opposed to other renunciants and the majority of Muslims who wore linen and cotton.[3] The practice of wearing wool as a sign of moral and political protest was bound up with social and cultural negotiations that took place around the concepts of renunciation, earning a living, and trust in God that were prevalent among Muslims during the second half of the eighth century CE. The details are hard to assemble, but some renunciants, though not all, expressed their renunciation by wearing wool, and hence the term "wool-wearer" came to carry the connotation of "renunciant" or "ascetic."

During the first century of Abbasid rule (ca. 750–850 CE), renunciation was a widespread form of piety in Muslim communities. Whether they wore wool or whether they were referred to as Sufis or not, renunciants of this period were not organized into a single homogenous movement but came in different colors and stripes. Those renunciants who were designated by the term *sufi* shared an aversion to worldly life but diverged in the way they translated their renunciation into social and spiritual terms. The collective term *sufiyya,* which first appeared in this period, designated not one distinct

social group but several different social types. Most properly understood, it was the name of a particular orientation toward piety marked by the socially unconventional, and thus remarkable, habit of donning woolen garments.[4]

In this same period, a remarkable development was under way among renunciants. Whatever their approach to renunciation and to the question of how far to detach themselves from mainstream social life, some prominent renunciants and the communities that formed around them began to direct their energies increasingly to the cultivation of the inner life. This inward turn manifested itself especially in new discourses on spiritual states, stages of spiritual development, closeness to God, and love. It also led to a clear emphasis on knowledge of the inner self acquired through the examination and training of the human soul. The proponents of this inward turn explored the psychological aspects of the renunciant themes of repentance, turning toward God, and placing one's trust in God through the scrupulous observation of divine commands. They reached the conclusion that true repentance could not be achieved without a rigorous examination of the conscience and the soul. For these ''interiorizing'' renunciants, the preoccupation of eschewing this world in order to cultivate the other world was transformed into a search for the other world within the inner self.[5]

Interestingly, the ''discovery'' and cultivation of the inner dimensions of the person was concomitant with a similar inward reorientation among the same circles of renunciants in an attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of the divine revelation. The concern with attaining knowledge of the inner self was accompanied by a parallel effort to discern the inner meaning of the Qur'an and the Sunna by using a method of interpretation based on inference and allusion. Moreover, in a further intriguing twist, these interiorizing developments were bundled up with a doctrine of selection, whereby knowledge of the soul and the understanding of the inner meanings of divine speech and the example of the Prophet were thought to be ''God-given'' as opposed to being the fruit of human effort. According to this doctrine, only God's elect, designated most notably as ''friends'' and ''protégés'' of God (*wali,* pl. *awliya'*), could attain ultimate self-knowledge and thus have access to aspects of divine knowledge. This idea of divine selection, later expressed by the interrelated terms *walaya* and *wilaya,* was most prominent among Shiites. However, it also seems to have been in circulation among all Muslims, especially in the form of Hadith reports about various categories of God's *awliya'*.[6]

The exact origin and trajectory of these trends are obscure, but some of the pioneering figures in this process, who were not all renunciants, can be identified. These include the female renunciant Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801 CE) in Basra, Shaqiq al-Balkhi (d. 810 CE) in northeastern Iran, Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830 CE) in Syria, Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (d. 860 CE) in Egypt, al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857 CE) in Baghdad, Yahya ibn Muadh al-Razi (d. 872 CE) in central Iran, and Bayazid al-Bastami (d. 848 or 875 CE) in

northeastern Iran. Since the historical record on these figures is ambiguous, it is not always possible to establish associations between particular trends and specific figures. Nevertheless, we can be more specific about the legacy of some of these ‘‘interiorizing’’ renunciants and early mystics. By way of illustration, let us review briefly the case of Bayazid (a contraction of ‘‘Abu Yazid’’).

Little is known about the biography of Bayazid, who seems to have spent his life in his native Bastam, to the east of Nishapur in northeastern Iran.[7] He was the earliest mystic to have left behind a substantial number of ‘ecstatic utterances’ (*shath*), most famously ‘‘Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!’’ and ‘‘I am he.’’[8] Bayazid explained how he thought God could talk through him in such a fashion in the following statement:

> Once [God] raised me up and caused me to stand before Him and said to me, ‘‘O Abu Yazid, My creatures desire to behold you.’’ I answered, ‘‘Adorn me with Your unity and clothe me in Your I-ness and raise me to your oneness, so that when Your creatures behold me they may say that they behold You, and that only You may be there, not I.’’[9]

Bayazid evidently thought that this request was granted, since many of the sayings attributed to him evince a complete erasure of his human subjectivity and its total replacement with God, conceived as the absolute ‘I,’ the only true subject in existence. In an early Arabic text of uncertain attribution, Bayazid reportedly recounted his ‘‘heavenly ascent’’ (*miʿraj,* thus paralleling the celebrated night journey and ascent of Muhammad) through the seven heavens to the divine throne, where he experienced such intimacy with God that he was ‘‘nearer to him than the spirit is to the body.’’[10] His often shocking, even outrageous, utterances became the subject of commentary by later mystics, who considered them the verbal overflow of experiential ecstasy.[11] Departing from Qur’anic usage, where reciprocal love between God and humans is expressed by the word *mahabba* (Qur’an 5:59), Bayazid characterized the relationship of love between the mystic and God as *ʿishq* (passionate love), a term normally used for love between humans. Through his powerful expressions of love for God, Bayazid later came to symbolize the insatiable, intoxicated lover:

> Yahya ibn Muadh [al-Razi, d. 872 CE] wrote to Abu Yazid [Bayazid], ‘‘I became intoxicated by the volume that I drank from the cup of his love.’’ Abu Yazid wrote to him in his reply, ‘‘You became intoxicated and what you drank were mere drops! [Meanwhile] someone else has drunk the oceans of the heavens and the earth and his thirst has still not been quenched; his tongue is hanging down from thirst and he is asking, ‘‘Is there more?’’[12]

We possess no clues as to how Bayazid achieved his experience of proximity to God. Reportedly, he was scrupulous in his observance of regular Islamic

rituals, but he apparently rejected renunciation as an option. He said, ''This world is nothing; how can one renounce it?' and advocated inner detachment from everything other than God instead.[13] In spite of the obscurity that surrounds his thought and practice, Bayazid achieved lasting fame as the clearest example of the possibility of direct, mystical communication with God even after the completion of the mission of Muhammad.[14]

Although similar portraits can be drawn for each of the other interiorizing figures listed above, here it will be sufficient to point to their connection with the major themes of the inward turn that characterized early Sufism. The tradition of examining the soul seems to have been especially strong in Basra among the followers of Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE), and it culminated in the thought of Muhasibi in Baghdad (Muhasibi was originally from Basra). The attempt to fathom the inner meaning of the Qur'an also had deep roots in Basra among the same circles, but it was cross-fertilized by similar trends originating from the sixth Shiite Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765 CE) in Medina and perhaps was further developed by Dhu'l-Nun. The idea of spiritual states and of a spiritual path consisting of different stages was nurtured by Darani in Syria, Shaqiq in Khurasan, and Dhu'l-Nun in Egypt. Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Bayazid exemplified love of God as a central preoccupation. Moving outside the boundaries of ''sober'' renunciation, Yahya ibn Muadh epitomized joyfulness as an outcome of reliance on God's mercy. The experience of closeness to God was, as noted above, famously verbalized in the ecstatic utterances of Bayazid. The idea that God appoints special agents from among the believers is not clearly connected with any early renunciant or mystic of this period.

While the trends of inner knowledge and divine selection of *awliya'* were certainly in the air and were cultivated by some eminent renunciants and early mystics of the first half of the ninth century CE, they did not form a coherent and unified whole but could only be found as correlated and occasionally intertwined strands of piety. In the second half of the ninth century, however, and especially in Baghdad, which had emerged as the political and cultural capital of the Abbasid domains, they coalesced with several other elements of religiosity to form a distinct type of piety that became the foundation of what would prove to be one of the most durable pietistic approaches in Islam. Furthermore, for reasons that remain obscure, the members of this Baghdad-centered movement came to be known as Sufis and the new movement was given the name *sufiyya*.

Thus, from the middle of the ninth century, the term *sufi* came to be used increasingly as a technical term to designate a group of people who belonged to a clearly identifiable social movement in Baghdad based on a distinct type of piety. The most prominent members of this movement were Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz (d. 899 CE or a few years earlier), Abu'l-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 907 CE), and Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE). In time, the Baghdad Sufis themselves adopted this name and began to use it for themselves. Henceforth, the word no longer signified ''wool-wearing renunciant'' but came to be

applied to the members of this new group. In this way, an epithet that had signified certain trends of renunciatory piety now became the name of a distinctive form of pious living that could no longer be characterized simply as renunciation.

The early Sufis of Baghdad were most concerned with obtaining experiential knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God, while distilling the reality of the Islamic profession of faith, "There is no god but God," into their daily lives. Human life presented itself to them as a journey toward the ever-elusive goal of achieving "God-consciousness," an ongoing attempt to draw near God. In the Sufi perspective, human beings, viewed as servants of God, experienced such proximity to their Lord before the beginning of time. Before their creation, all human beings bore witness in spirit to God's Lordship on the Day of the Covenant (Qur'an 7:172). As a reward for this act of acknowledgment, they were promised an even more intimate closeness to God at the end of time. While on earth, however, they had to strive to preserve and renew the memory of their proximity to their Creator by turning their backs on everything other than God and by living their lives in constant recognition of His presence.

In practice, this meant the training and domestication of the lower self through measures that included, for many but not all Sufis, asceticism, seclusion, and poverty as well as continuous cultivation of the heart. The heart was understood as the spiritual organ of God's presence in the person, and its chief sustenance was the remembrance or mention of God through invocation (*dhikr*) and "hearing" or witnessing God in poetry and music (*sama'*). Paradoxically, the journey (*suluk*) toward the Lord started only when the Sufi realized his own weakness as an autonomous agent and acknowledged God as the only true actor in the universe. Only when the reins of human action were turned over to God did the individual become a wayfarer (*salik*) and begin the journey toward the goal of achieving proximity to the Creator.

This journey was envisaged as a path (*tariq* or *tariqa*) marked by various stations (*manzil*), locations (*maqam*), and states (*hal*) that the wayfarer passed through. However, at this earliest stage of Sufism there was not yet any systematic thinking, let alone any agreement, on the number, nature, and order of these states and stations. Nor was there a consensus on the destination of the journey. Everyone agreed that closeness to God entailed a sharp turn from lower concerns of this world toward the realm of ultimate matters and a movement away from the lower self toward the inner locus of God's presence, but it proved difficult to characterize the final encounter with God located at the end of the journey. While some, like Kharraz and Nuri, described the highest stage of intimacy with God as the dissolution of self-consciousness, others like Junayd viewed the ultimate goal as a reconstituted self, a human identity recomposed in the image of God after being thoroughly deconstructed during the Sufi journey. All agreed, however, that the ultimate Sufi experience was to be viewed as the passing away or reabsorption of the created human being into the only true/real (*haqq*) being of

God and, most emphatically, not as a divinization of the human. More generally, the encounter between the Sufi and God was a "unidirectional merger," whereby the Sufi was thought to flow into God. However, movement in the other direction was off limits or at least extremely limited, since such a flow from the divine into the human could pave the way for the divinization of the human and lead to the suspect, even heretical, doctrines of incarnation and inherence (*hulul*).

No matter what their approach to the thorny issue of encounter with the Divine, those who shared the common aim of drawing close to God through experiential knowing enjoyed a special camaraderie with one another in the form of circles of fellowship, mutual mentoring, and relationships of master and disciple. Not all human beings became Sufi wayfarers, let alone grew close to God: that privilege was, it seems, reserved for the few "Friends of God" (*awliya' Allah*) that were conscious of their special status and viewed themselves as the spiritual elect. Many friends, much like the prophets, saw themselves as God's special agents among humans, rendered distinct by their special status as intermediaries between the divine and the human planes of being. In their view, they channeled God's mercy to humankind and served to increase God-consciousness among the otherwise heedless, self-absorbed human race through their personal example and their tireless advocacy of God's cause in human affairs.

The special status of the friends of God manifested itself in a number of practices that simultaneously underscored their distinctness from common believers and served to forge bonds of fellowship, loyalty, and mutual allegiance among the spiritual elect. They began to assemble in certain places of congregation and travel in groups, developed distinctive prayer rituals in the form of invocations and auditions to poetry and music that frequently led to rapture or ecstasy (*wajd*), and adopted special initiation practices, notably investiture with a white woolen robe (*khirqa*).[15] It seems likely, although difficult to verify, that other initiatic acts that came to be characteristic of Sufism, such as the handclasp, the bestowal of a cord with prayer beads (*tasbih*), and the entrusting of the initiate with an invocation formula, were also practiced by the first Sufis of Baghdad.[16]

While the institution of the *Sufiyya* was taking shape in Baghdad, individuals and social groups with similar views and practices could also be found among Muslim communities in other locations, even though these latter were not generally known as Sufis. Most notable among these were Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896 CE) in lower Iraq, al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d. probably between 905 and 910 CE) in Central Asia, and a group of mystics in northeastern Iran who were known as the "People of Blame" (*Malamatiyya*). There was a considerable overlap between the ideas and practices of Tustari, Tirmidhi, the People of Blame, and the Baghdad Sufis. They shared a number of common features: (1) the stress on the necessity of a permanent reorientation of the individual self toward God in the form of repentance (*tawba*); (2) the

assumption of a fierce antagonism between the lower self and the heart; (3) the acceptance of human weakness and the recognition of God as the only true agent and savior; (4) the invocation as the sure link between God and His chosen servants; (5) the idea of a primordial covenant; (6) belief in the existence of a spiritual elect.

Nevertheless, the similarities among these different mystics and the broader communities around them were by no means comprehensive. Certain aspects of the thought and practice of Tustari, Tirmidhi, and the People of Blame, such as vegetarianism, a proclivity for having visions, and a peculiar "light" cosmology centered on the idea of "the light of Muhammad," did not have clear parallels among the Sufis of Baghdad. There were also points of disagreement. For instance, when Junayd was told that the followers of Tustari fasted during the day and ate from food saved in their baskets at night, he expressed regret that they did not forgo reliance on saved food.[17] Tustari endorsed earning a living as part of the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, while Junayd preferred complete reliance on God (*tawakkul*), unadulterated with the search for sustenance.[18] Although the Sufis of Baghdad were discrete about their status as God's elect, both Tustari and Tirmidhi were explicit about their own standing among the Friends of God. Tustari used to say: "I am the proof of God for created beings and I am a proof for the saints of my time." Tirmidhi, who gave one of the most systematic treatments of the concept of "friendship with God" (*walaya*) in Islamic thought, claimed the key role in this saintly hierarchy for himself.[19] The People of Blame, on the other hand, viewed all claims of spiritual rank with utmost suspicion and preferred anonymity and social conformity.[20] However, despite such real differences in approach, there was a sense of generic affinity among the various regional mystical tendencies and the term *Sufiyya* was already used by some at the beginning of the tenth century CE to express this shared commitment to the cultivation of the inner life.

Already during the days of Junayd, Nuri, and Kharraz, Baghdad Sufis taught numerous students from different regions of the Abbasid Empire. These students later spread the distinctive teachings and practices of their Sufi teachers to southwestern Iran, western Arabia, and northeastern Iran. For example, Abu 'Abdallah Ibn Khafif (d. 982 CE) of Shiraz in southwestern Iran played a major role in the establishment of Baghdad style Sufism in his home city. Ibn Khafif is better known than many of his contemporaries because one of his disciples, Abu'l-Hasan al-Daylami (fl. tenth century CE), wrote a biography of his teacher. Not counting the relatively short autobiography of Tirmidhi, this is the earliest biography we possess for any Muslim mystic. During the lifetime of Ibn Khafif, there were at least seven different Sufi centers in Shiraz, including Ibn Khafif's own lodge (*ribat*), and the total number of Sufis in that city was reportedly in the thousands. Many of these Sufis, like Ibn Khafif himself, were disciples of Baghdad Sufis, especially of Junayd. In Mecca, several students of Baghdad Sufis lived as permanent

"visitors" (*mujawir*) of the Sacred Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) at the beginning of the tenth century CE.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the picture was similar, with Sufi lodges reported in different towns in Syria, Iraq, and southwestern Iran. The mystics of these regions were all closely connected, keeping in touch with one another through travel and written correspondence. The majority, it appears, were connected to the first generation of Baghdad Sufis as well as to Tustari of Basra. They honored especially Junayd and Tustari as their most important leaders. The legacy of local figures continued to exercise considerable influence, but the impact of Baghdad and, to some extent, Basra Sufi networks was definitely on the rise. This was increasingly the case also with northeastern regions of Iran, where Baghdad-style Sufism grew firm roots during the course of the tenth century.[21]

The growth of Sufism in northeastern Iran came about as a merger between the Sufis of Iraq and the indigenous People of Blame of this region, especially in its major urban center Nishapur, a merger in which the dominant partner was increasingly Sufism, the new arrival in town.[22] During the course of the tenth century, the Sufis emerged as the more vocal and visible mystical movement in Nishapur and, it appears, also in many other locations in northeastern Iran, while the People of Blame remained faithful to their principles of anonymity and disappeared into the background. Our understanding of the merger between Sufis and the People of Blame in Nishapur is based largely on the rich literary legacy of a key figure whose many works form the principal source for the history of both Sufism and the Path of Blame, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE). Sulami's extant works, in particular his biographical anthology *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* (Generations of the Sufis), his compendium of Sufi Qur'an interpretation *Haqa'iq al-tafsir* (Truths of Qur'anic Exegesis), and his treatise on the Path of Blame, along with his many other works of varying length, have a distinct place in the corpus of early Sufi literature. Indeed, in most of his treatises, Sulami's voice is that of an authoritative representative of Sufism, and the care he took in recording the biographies, sayings, and discourses of Sufis, male as well as female, is ample proof of his special standing as a most valuable informant for the early history of Islamic mysticism.[23]

The Path of Blame was originally a Nishapur-based phenomenon. Elsewhere in northeastern Iran, the spread of Mesopotamian Sufism did not necessarily take the form of a blending of this latter trend with indigenous mystical approaches; rather, it appears to have occurred through importation. It is likely that we owe one of the earliest surviving "surveys" of Sufism, *Kitab al-luma' fi'l-tasawwuf* (The Book of Light Flashes on Sufism) of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988 CE), to this process of transplantation of a mystical school that had first taken shape in Iraq to the different cultural environment of northeastern Iran. Sarraj evidently traveled widely in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt in order to meet Sufi shaykhs and their students and to collect accurate

information about their lives and teachings. In all, he managed to gather firsthand information from 39 Sufi authorities on approximately 200 Sufis.[24] Sarraj poured his findings into 157 chapters. He organized the chapters into an introduction on the place of Sufism within Islam and 13 "books" devoted to the subjects of states and stations, adherence to the Qur'an, following the model of the Prophet, Qur'an interpretation, Companions of the Prophet, Sufi conduct, differences of opinion on Sufi doctrine, Sufi writings and poetry, audition, ecstasy, miracles, Sufi terminology, ecstatic utterances, and errors associated with Sufism. The result was a comprehensive compendium as solid in substance as it was rich in detail.

The spread of Sufism to Central Asia is more difficult to trace. Nevertheless, we can be confident that Sufism was definitely introduced to the Muslim communities in the region, since one of the earliest extant Sufi manuals, *al-Taʿarruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf* (Introducing the Way of the People of Sufism), was written in Bukhara by Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 CE).[25] Representatives of Baghdad Sufism were probably still rare in Central Asia, but there is no doubt that some Sufis were to be found there. Nonetheless, even if they were present, Sufis were clearly not very well known in these regions. Indeed, the organization of Kalabadhi's book, true to the somewhat prosaic and distanced ring of its title, also gives the impression that its author was engaged in an attempt to introduce his readers to a new and foreign subject.

The diffusion of Sufism to regions beyond Iraq during the course of the tenth century CE and its fusion with indigenous mystical trends went apace with the emergence of a self-conscious Sufi tradition. The situation in Syria, lower Iraq, Egypt, and North Africa is less than clear, but especially in northeastern Iran, the need to introduce Sufism to new audiences seems to have contributed to the construction of a coherent narrative about Sufism, as exemplified in the surveys of Sarraj, Kalabadhi, and the various works of Sulami. However, the foreign nature of Sufism in regions other than Iraq was not the main reason for the appearance of academic overviews of *tasawwuf* from the mid-tenth century onwards. More significant was the passage of time. Sufism, which had crystallized in Baghdad during the last quarter of the previous century, now literally had a history, and the Sufis of the late tenth century, who were already a generation or two removed from the time of Junayd and his companions, felt the need to preserve, evaluate, and analyze the complex legacy of the first masters. Their life examples, their sayings, and their behavior had to be recorded, their debates scrutinized, and their vision perpetuated. Moreover, as was the case with all modes of piety, the boundaries of "normative" Sufism needed to be ascertained in order to consolidate and fortify the tradition and simultaneously to dissociate it from similar but suspect approaches of all kinds.

The emergence of a normative Sufi tradition during the tenth century CE can be traced most clearly in the appearance of a specialized literature that

was self-consciously about Sufis and Sufism. Very often, the fundamental building blocks of this body of writing were reports about individual Sufis. These were anecdotal in nature and normally transmitted a saying or a statement of the Sufi in question. Two major genres of Sufi literature grew out of these historical reports about the Sufis: the survey and the biographical compilation. These two genres were sometimes combined in the form of discrete sections into a single work. The material they conveyed was compiled and packaged in various ways to serve different but related functions: pedagogical guidance for those who aspired to become Sufis, pious commemoration of past masters, building corporate solidarity among Sufis, and confident self-presentation and self-assertion vis-à-vis other groups competing for authority within the Muslim community. The specialized Sufi literature of the tenth and eleventh centuries CE was produced by Sufis of two divergent orientations: "Traditionalists" who were averse to all scholarship that assigned a prominent role to human reason and "Academic" Sufis who, by contrast, were aligned with legal and theological scholarship.

The Traditionalist camp, which refused to recognize any sources of knowledge other than the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad, is well represented by Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996 CE). Makki was the author of *Qut al-qulub* (The Sustenance of Hearts). This book had a remarkable afterlife: one of the most celebrated Islamic works of all times, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's (d. 1111 CE) *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Bringing the Religious Sciences to Life) was in part a reworking and expansion of Makki's often dense and at times abstruse compendium on piety.[26] Other prominent Traditionalists included Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038 CE), the author of a voluminous biographical compendium titled *Hilyat al-awliya' wa tabaqat al-asfiya'* (The Ornament of God's Friends and Generations of Pure Ones). Another was Abu Mansur al-Isfahani (d. 1027 CE), a prominent contemporary of Abu Nu'aym in Isfahan, who authored several works on Sufism, including the earliest independent treatise on invocation (*dhikr*) and a short work on Sufi conduct (*adab*). Still another was 'Abdallah al-Ansari (d. 1089 CE), a well-known Qur'an commentator, Hadith scholar, and tireless polemicist and preacher on behalf of Traditionalism.[27]

Abu Mansur and Ansari in particular directed their formidable talents and energies to the dissemination and popularization of Sufi thought and practice by training disciples and preaching Sufi values to audiences in their native towns, Isfahan and Herat. Ansari dictated many works to his personal secretary and to several scribes from among his disciples, among them the first treatise on Sufism written in Persian, a spiritual itinerary in 10 sections of 10 stages titled *Sad maydan* (Hundred Fields). Ansari updated this spiritual itinerary 25 years later, this time in Arabic, with a treatise titled *Manazil al-sa'irin* (The Stages of Wayfarers). The *Stages,* partly because it was in Arabic, proved to be very popular and attracted many commentaries. Remarkably, within less than half a century, it had made its way to Islamic Iberia

(al-Andalus), where it formed the basis of Ibn al-ʿArif's (d. 1141 CE) *Mahasin al-majalis* (The Beauties of Spiritual Sessions). Ansari's concern for pedagogical guidance of his disciples, so conspicuous in the works mentioned so far, gave rise to another major work in Persian. It appears that Ansari used Sulami's *Generations* as a basis for some of his lectures, and his students' notes of their master's commentary and expansion of Sulami's work were later compiled to form another *Tabaqat al-sufiyya* (Generations of Sufis). However, to this day Ansari is best known among Persian-speaking audiences for a collection of sayings that go under the name *Munajat* (Intimate Conversations).[28]

For the Traditionalists, Makki, Abu Nuʿaym, Abu Mansur, and Ansari, as well as the circles of followers and students around them, Sufism was an integral part, even the very core, of Islam. In their writings on Sufi subjects, they spoke "from within" with a confident and self-assured voice, and they generally did not acknowledge the existence of contending views on Islam, such as semi-rationalist and rationalist legal and theological discourses, except when they denounced them. Their counterparts Sarraj, Sulami, and Kalabadhi, however, struck a different note in their surveys on Sufism. Theirs was a more distanced approach, at times almost academic in tone, and they were motivated by a desire to introduce their audiences, the literate cultural elites of northeastern Iran and Central Asia, to this new and largely foreign subject. Because these elites were immersed in legal and theological discourses, these latter authors adopted a more accommodating stance than the Traditionalists vis-à-vis the prevalent legal schools as well as philosophical theology and did not shirk from using legal and theological vocabulary in explaining Sufism to their readers. Theological discourses were on the rise, and the legal schools were consolidating themselves in eastern Iran and Central Asia. Thus, the temptation to develop a theologically and legally up-to-date form of Sufism was irresistible. A generation after Sulami, two Sufi authors, Qushayri and Hujviri, rose to this challenge with such skill that the surveys they produced eclipsed most earlier works of this genre and came to assume almost canonical status for later Sufis and observers of Sufism alike.

Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072 CE) was a student of Sulami and a prolific scholar, with no less than 22 titles to his name. However, his reputation as a Sufi author rests primarily on his survey of Sufism, which was simply known as *al-Risala* (The Treatise).[29] While Qushayri's *Risala* is comparable in approach to Kalabadhi's *Taʿarruf*, in substance it can be viewed as a judicious combination and rewriting of Sulami's *Tabaqat* and Sarraj's *Lumaʿ*. Throughout the *Risala,* Qushayri's voice is authoritative and scholarly. According to Qushayri, there is a complete correspondence between the goals of Islamic scholarship and Sufism, yet scholars should yield to the Sufi shaykhs and show humility toward them since these latter have reached the final destination. Conversely, Sufi shaykhs should not shirk from using rational arguments in training their disciples when necessary.[30] This happy

marriage between Sufism and legal–theological scholarship is the hallmark of the *Risala,* and Qushayri's harmonious packaging of the two modes of learning and piety, as well as the astute inclusion of biographical notices in his survey of Sufism, assured enduring popularity to his work.

A similar blending of scholarly tendencies and Sufism, albeit in a different cultural milieu and a different language, can be seen in ʿAli al-Hujviri's (d. between 1073 and 1077 CE), *Kashf al-mahjub* (Uncovering the Veiled), the first major survey of Sufism in the Persian language.[31] In this work, Hujviri drew a broad portrait of Sufism and similar mystical movements and succeeded in giving his readers an inclusive and panoramic survey of the different Sufi approaches to some key theoretical issues. This ecumenical approach of Hujviri was another permutation of the fusion of Sufism and legal–theological scholarship that Qushayri had accomplished so effectively before him. Like Qushayri, Hujviri used scholarly, specifically theological, tools to describe Sufism for his readers. In doing so, he not only broadened the scope of Sufism to include indigenous mystical trends but also rendered this inclusive model of Sufism intelligible to cultural elites familiar with the approaches and idioms of the world of scholarship. Significantly, he incorporated rational argumentation into his discussion of Sufi doctrines on a regular basis. He not only evoked the authority of legal and theological scholars but also adopted their style of exposition and argumentation over and above the faithful reproduction of reports about the major Sufis of the past, which had been the method preferred by all previous surveyors of Sufism.

Qushayri and Hujviri succeeded in aligning Sufism with legal and theological scholarship. The "fully accredited" and scholastically legitimated Sufism that was forged in northeastern Iran and Central Asia in the eleventh century CE gradually assumed authoritative status across the Muslim world. Even more than the surveys of Qushayri and Hujviri, this process was facilitated by the popularity of a seminal work and true Islamic best-seller that carried the fruits of "accredited" Sufism to the farthest reaches of Islam. This was *Ihyaʾ ʿulum al-din* (Bringing the Religious Sciences to Life) by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. In time, the bridge thus drawn between Sufis and legal and theological scholars came to be crossed in both directions by an increasing number of Sufi–scholars and scholar–Sufis, leading to a cross-fertilization that ushered in a new phase of Islamic cultural history.

The development of a specialized Sufi literature was only the literary aspect of the emergence of the Sufi tradition as a major social and cultural phenomenon in Islam. The shaping of Sufism as a distinct tradition was also evident in the formation of local groups of disciples around major Sufi masters. Such communities had existed from the first phase of Sufi history, as exemplified by what appear to have been tightly knit groups around Junayd in Baghdad and Tustari in Basra. These groups were held together by the charisma of the master and the efficacy of his life example as perceived by his followers. Concomitantly with the formation of these first communities, similar groups

came to exist in other locations, such as the one around Ibn Khafif in Shiraz, which may have numbered as many as a few hundred devotees. Under Ibn Khafif's guidance, beginning-level aspirants to Sufism were required to earn a living, dress simply, refrain from eating meat, eat and sleep little, and cultivate truthfulness (*sidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*).[32] A second-generation disciple of Ibn Khafif, Abu Ishaq al-Kazaruni (d. 1033 CE), created a widespread network of lodges centered on his hometown of Kazarun. Kazaruni asked his disciples to acquire and apply knowledge of the Shari'a, to avoid ostentatious dress and behavior, to keep the company of the poor, the trustworthy (*sadiqan*), and the virtuous (*salihan*), and to avoid the company of the powerful. These latter included kings, commanders, oppressors, judges and administrators, and the worldly (*ahl-i dunya*). His followers were further instructed to not sit with women and beardless youths, to be kind, mild, and modest, and to exercise nobility and generosity. They were not allowed to go to the cemetery to recite the Qur'an for a fee, to overdo charity so as to avoid becoming needy oneself, to accept gifts from commanders and high administrators, to oppress anyone, to keep night prayers, to take an hour every day for invocations, and to serve one's companions, the poor, and travelers.[33]

The local communities that formed around particular Sufi masters did not survive beyond a few generations. It was not long, however, before another kind of community came into existence that proved to have more staying power than the local circle of disciples. This was the "spiritual lineage," the idea that those who studied under a particular master shared a common spiritual heritage in the form of the master's unique "path" or "method" (*tariq* or *tariqa*). Spiritual lineages were often connected with one another across time and space, and thus united Sufis across the Muslim world into a far-flung spiritual family. From this point, it was but a short step to the idea that all those who shared the same pedigree made up a quasi-familial community. Such spiritual lineages took some time to develop, and the different stages of this development are difficult to document. It is, however, likely that the growing significance of the concept of the spiritual lineage (*silsila* or *nasab*) was bound up with an increasing emphasis, especially during the course of the eleventh century CE, on the role of the Sufi shaykh as a "master of training" (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*) as opposed to his role as "master of instruction" (*shaykh al-ta'lim*).[34]

In the first century of Sufi history, instruction (*ta'lim*) took the form of a shaykh imparting Sufi wisdom in a conversation or in a lecture to a single aspirant (*murid*) or to a circle of aspirants or other interested listeners in meetings held at the shaykh's house, or more typically, in a mosque. Such instruction, as exemplified by the teachings of Ibn Khafif and Kazaruni, was considered a necessity and was valued highly by serious aspirants, who were expected to follow the example of their shaykhs. By contrast, training (*tarbiyya*) meant spiritual direction: the shaykh took an interest in, and even assumed responsibility for, the spiritual progress of the aspirants, and he

directed, supervised, and criticized their behavior. It is clear that in this first phase of Sufi history, instruction and training were inextricably intertwined: Sufi masters taught by training and trained by teaching. From the mid-tenth century CE on, however, training gradually began to gain an added significance until in the following century when it even became a subject for detailed theoretical discussion.

This new emphasis on training manifested itself in expressions on the significance of obedience to one's shaykh. In an analogy that became increasingly popular, the shaykh was compared to the physician. Hujviri declared, "The shaykhs of this path [Sufism] are the physicians of hearts." If there was any doubt about the status of the Sufi master, this was dispelled by establishing a clear correspondence between him and the Prophet Muhammad: "The shaykh in his congregation is like the Prophet in his community."[35]

The new emphasis on teaching and the corresponding elevation of the Sufi master to the position of an awe-inspiring "spiritual director" vis-à-vis his novices formed the thread with which lasting spiritual lineages were woven around particularly efficacious masters of training. Increasingly, aspirants who were accepted as novices by a shaykh were initiated not only into Sufism but also into a particular lineage held together by bonds of loyalty and devotion. Such bonds were extended from the novices and experienced disciples to the master and were reciprocated by bonds of guidance and protection running in the other direction from the master toward his novices and disciples. Aspirants to the Sufi way submitted to the authority of the master with complete trust. In return, the master pledged to guide them to their goal and to protect them from hidden dangers on the road of spiritual development. This "director–novice" relationship (often known as *suhba*) was solemnized through formal initiation and graduation ceremonies. Such ceremonies involved elements such as the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) and the handclasp during the initial instruction of the formula of invocation, as well as the bestowal of a "certificate of graduation" (*ijaza*) accompanied by a special insignia, most notably a cloak (*khirqa*) when the novice attained his goal. The rise to prominence of the director–novice relationship led to the formation of extended spiritual lineages, some of which were powerful enough to spawn social communities held together through devotion to a particular master. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of these new spiritual families and the main social locus for the formation of communities around them was the Sufi lodge.

From its tentative beginnings in the first half of the tenth century CE, the Sufi lodge grew into a more durable institution. By the time Qushayri composed his *Risala* in 1045 CE, where, among other things, he recorded the growing emphasis on the "master of training," the lodge had emerged as a social site for the manifestation of the spiritual power of Sufi shaykhs as training masters.[36] Abu Sa'id-i Abu'l-Khayr (d. 1049 CE), a contemporary of Qushayri from eastern Iran, appears to be the first Sufi master who explicitly

spelled out rules for communal living for his resident disciples. Abu Sa'id expected the inhabitants of his lodge to follow these rules: (1) to keep clean and ritually pure; (2) to reside only in a place where they can engage in pious works; (3) to perform the ritual prayers together at the beginning of the appointed times; (4) to pray during the night; (5) to pray for forgiveness at dawn; (6) to recite the Qur'an and not to talk until sunrise; (7) to engage in sessions of invocation and litanies (*wird*) between the evening and night prayers; (8) to welcome the needy, the poor, and whoever joins their company and to serve them; (9) to eat only together; (10) not to leave the company of others without their consent. In addition, the residents of Abu Sa'id's lodge were asked to spend whatever free time they had only for three purposes: to gain knowledge or to say litanies, to earn a living, or to bring benefit and comfort to others.[37] These rules bear a close resemblance to Ibn Khafif's and Kazaruni's recommendations to their aspirants, and similarly do not impose rules of celibacy or the avoidance of gainful employment. Abu Sa'id also provided two separate lists of 10 qualifications that a true master and a sincere disciple, respectively, should possess.[38] With the establishment of lodges as prominent social institutions, Sufi spiritual lineages were slowly but surely being woven into the fabric of the larger societies around them.

The ascendancy of training masters who increasingly came to preside over communities of Sufis that resided in lodges coincided with the rise to prominence of saint cults among Muslims. Originally based on the belief in the existence of a divinely appointed company of saints, Muslim saint cults began to take shape during the ninth and tenth centuries CE. There is little doubt that they were in full bloom by the eleventh century CE, when clear references to this practice began to appear in intellectual life. If, according to Sufi theorists, the *awliya' Allah* were friends and protégés of God due to their proximity to Him, for the common people the *awliya'* represented direct pathways to God because of this closeness. Having excelled in devotion and service to God, they became intermediaries as well as patrons who functioned as linchpins in the relationship between God and human beings. In practical terms, the saint cults manifested themselves as an ideological and ritual complex organized around the concept of spiritual power (*baraka*), and the ritualistic performance of visiting tombs and other holy places (*ziyara*). *Baraka* was the holy power inherent in a saintly figure that set him or her apart from everyone else; it was normally conceived as a fluid force that emanated from the saint, alive or dead, and permeated the places, persons, and objects around him, and its ultimate proof was the saintly miracle (*karama*).[39] *Ziyara* was a complex of rituals that included prayer, supplication, votive offerings, sprinkling fragrances and water, sleeping next to tombs, residing within their confines, circumambulation of them, touching and rubbing them, and taking soil and rocks from them.[40] Through the rituals of visitation, devotees became beneficiaries of the saint's power. In this sacred transaction, the *awliya'* were perceived as patrons who could intercede in the divine court on behalf of

their devotees. In all regions, "the most important criterion of whether a person merited the status of sainthood was the manifestation of evidentiary miracles," followed closely by mediation and intercession.[41] Miracles were often perceived as the realization of the saint's intermediary and intercessory powers; it was through miracles that the saint functioned as a patron and intermediary for his devotees.

Significantly, Muslim saint cults were not simply the social realization of theories of sainthood formulated by mystics. Instead, they developed separately from, though in conversation with, Sufi theories of sainthood. In this regard, it is important that the *awliya'* most venerated by the people were not necessarily identical with the favorite *awliya'* of the Sufis. Popular saints were not always mystics; conversely, those considered Friends of God by the inner circle of mystics were not always accorded saintly status by the public. Popular saints included pre-Islamic prophets, the family of the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants, Companions of the Prophet and their followers, martyrs of early battles and conquests, Shiite Imams, the first four Caliphs, and Sufis, rulers, scholars, theologians, and even judges.[42] While a high proportion of popular saints of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were learned, and many were acquainted with or actively practiced Sufism, Sufis did not have a monopoly over sainthood.[43] Nevertheless, the overlap between the two spheres was significant, and Sufis, along with those learned and proficient in religious matters, made up the majority of saints.

When viewed against the backdrop of the formative history of the saint cults, the ascendancy of the training master as well as the elevation of the authority of the Sufi shaykh to new heights gain new meaning. The rise of the authoritative spiritual director who presided over a community of disciples occurred in tandem with the rise of the popular saint, who acted as a patron and an intermediary for the broad community of his devotees. In this way, many training masters came to exercise authority not only over his immediate disciples but also over a much larger community of devotees who relied on him for intercession and intermediation. Through this conjunction of Sufi and popular models of sainthood, Sufism gradually ceased to be a form of piety that appealed almost exclusively to the urban middle and upper-middle classes and began to spread through the whole social canvas of premodern Islamic societies, from political elites to wage-earners in urban centers to peasants and nomads in the countryside. Sainthood increasingly came to be defined almost exclusively in Sufi terms, and Sufi masters began to exercise considerable power in all spheres of social life.

From the twelfth century CE onwards when Sufism became mainstream, the Sufi presence in Islamic societies took the form of distinct social groupings generally known as "orders" (*tariqa*, pl. *turuq*).[44] These were institutionalized mappings of spiritual lineages onto the social fabric and appeared as networks of lodges woven around nodes of master–disciple relationships. The lodges were built and maintained primarily by the financial support of

local and regional elites that was made available to the Sufis in the form of pious foundations (*waqf*). Since the Sufi masters, who often doubled as popular saints, were frequently buried in their lodges, many Sufi lodges became tomb-shrines and centers for the practice of saint cults. Since the twelfth century CE, Sufi orders of local, regional, and international scope have proliferated at an astonishing rate throughout the Muslim world. The most widespread and durable of these have been the Qadiriyya, Kubrawiyya, Shadhiliyya, Naqshbandiyya, and Khalwatiyya orders, followed by such regional orders as the Chishtiyya in South Asia and the Mevleviye in Anatolia. These orders represent an extremely wide range of Sufi activity at different levels of institutionalization, and they continue to define Sufism for Muslims in the present day.

The twelfth century CE formed a watershed for the spiritual, intellectual, and artistic landscape of Sufism. Up to this point, Sufis, concerned with cultivating their own tradition, had largely maintained an inward orientation. However, the alignment of this distinct form of piety with legal and theological scholarship at the hands of "academic" Sufis like Qushayri and Hujviri opened the floodgates through which legal, theological, and philosophical thinking could flow into Sufism. Indeed, from the end of the eleventh century, Sufis began to open up to the different intellectual discourses that were widely available in Islamic societies. These included not only legal, theological, and philosophical speculations but also an array of "occult" sciences, including interpretation of dreams and other visionary experiences as well as divination and prognostication. This influx of various intellectual currents into Sufi thought was accompanied by a concomitant fusion of different pietistic orientations during the same period, so that Sufism, which had been associated mostly with renunciation and asceticism, came to blend with other forms of piety such as messianism, apocalypticism, and esoterism. The expansion of the scope of Sufi thought and practice to all levels and aspects of social and intellectual life also resulted in an unprecedented literary and artistic florescence. Poetic and musical expression, which had been a special feature of Sufism from its very beginnings, now reached new artistic heights in all of the cultures (most notably Arabic and Persian) of the Muslim world. This confluence of Sufism with other intellectual, artistic, and spiritual trends produced a stellar array of seminal Sufi figures during this period, of whom Abu Madyan (d. 1197 CE), Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1221CE), Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240 CE), and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273 CE) are prominent examples. The almost complete blending of Sufism into all forms of Islamic social and cultural life from the twelfth century CE onwards makes it practically impossible to write the history of Sufism as if it were a self-contained tradition of mystical thought and practice. In a very real sense, nearly all of subsequent Islamic history was colored if not permeated by Sufi themes and practices. Clearly, the Sufis had succeeded in conveying the significance of their central concern, which was to obtain experiential knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God's unity by

distilling the reality of the Islamic profession of faith, "There is no god but God," into their daily lives. This was acknowledged by the great majority of their fellow Muslims in all walks of life.

NOTES

1. This chapter is a much condensed and selective version of my forthcoming study on the history of early Sufism titled *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

2. For a synopsis of early usages of the term *sufi,* see Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 30–32.

3. The earliest use of the term, *sufi* is associated with Abu Hashim of Kufa (d. 767–768 CE) and it was definitely in circulation by the first half of the ninth century. See Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism,* trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 105.

4. For a catalog of Muslim ascetics in the eighth century CE, see Massignon, *Essay,* 113–119. For a longer treatment, see Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism* trans. Birgitta Sharpe (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 33–54.

5. For a pithy discussion of the theme of repentance among early renunciants, see Gerhard Böwering, "Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics,* ed. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45–50.

6. The clustering of the themes of inner life, inner meaning of the Qur'an, and doctrine of selection is suggested by Bernd Radtke in "Baten," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 2: 859–861 (quote on 860).

7. "Bestami (Bastami), Bayazid," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 4: 183–186 (Gerhard Böwering).

8. "Shath," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition 9: 361b (Carl Ernst); for an in-depth treatment of ecstatic utterances, see Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1985).

9. Abu Nasr 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ali al-Sarraj, *Kitab al-luma fi'l-tasawwuf,* ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1914), 382; trans. Nicholson in the English section 102 (with minor changes).

10. Reynold A. Nicholson, "An Early Arabic Version of the Miraj of Abu Yazid al-Bistami," Islamica 2, no. 3 (1926): 403–408, trans. in Michael Anthony Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Quran, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 244–250; the quote is from 249.

11. For the earliest of such commentaries, most notably by Junayd (d. 910 CE), see Sarraj, *al-Luma,* 380–395. This selection is translated in Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 214–231. Sells also translated (on pages 234–242) some sayings of Bayazid found in two later sources.

12. Ahmad ibn 'Abdallah Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-awliya' wa-tabaqat al-asfiya'* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1967), 10: 40; translation reproduced, with

minor omissions, from Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Tabaqat Genre from al-Sulami to Jami* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 54.

13. ''Bestami (Bastami), Bayazid,'' *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 4: 184 (Gerhard Böwering).

14. The evolution of Bayazid's image in the Sufi biographical tradition is traced in detail in Mojaddedi, *Biographical Tradition.*

15. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam,* trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3, 226–228 contains a very useful, albeit brief, catalog of ''ritual practices peculiar to'' the Sufis, many of which must have been practiced by the Baghdad Sufis.

16. By contrast, the prayer-rug (*sajjada*) and its use as a form of investiture does not seem to date back to the ninth century. The earliest attestation of the use of the *sajjada* by Sufis is a passing reference in the *Kitab al-luma'* of al-Sarraj who died in 988 CE. See Sarraj, *al-Luma',* 201. For a depiction of Junayd with a string of prayer beads, see 'Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri, *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya,* ed. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud ibn al-Sharif (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1966), 119.

17. Fritz Meier, *Abu Said-i Abu l-Hayr (357–440/967–1049): Wirklichkeit und Legende* (Tehran: Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1976), 4.

18. For Tustari's stance on labor, see for instance Qushayri, *al-Risala,* 421, where Tustari is credited with the saying, ''Earning a living is Sunna, and he who keeps to the Prophet's state does not abandon his Sunna.''

19. Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Quranic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari* (d. 283/896) (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1980), 64, citing 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani's *al-Tabaqat al-kubra,* two vols. (Cairo, 1315/1897), vol. I, 67. On Tirmidhi's views of ''friendship with God,'' see Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi,* trans. Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, Curzon Sufi Series (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1996), passim (for instance 207).

20. On the Malamatiyya, see Sara Sviri, ''Hakim Tirmidhi and the Malamati Movement in Early Sufism,'' in *Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi,* ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London and New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 583–613.

21. Detailed information on the spread of Sufism to southwestern Iran, western Arabia, and northeastern Iran can be found in Florian Sobieroj, *Ibn Hafif As-Sirazi und seine Schrift zur Novizenerziehung (Kitab al-Iqtisad)* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft im Kommission bei F. Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1998).

22. This confluence of Sufiyya and Malamatiyya is documented in Christopher Melchert, ''Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur,'' *Iran* 39 (2001): 237–247.

23. See Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad ibn al-Husayn as-Sulami, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-niswa al-muta'abbidat as-sufiyyat,* ed. and trans. Rkia Elaroui Cornell (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999), especially the translator's introduction, where a lost work titled *Brothers and Sisters among the Sufis* is mentioned (p. 39). Of

Sulami's works, there are about thirty titles extant in manuscript, many now published, out of a total of over one hundred attributed to him. See "al-Sulami, Abu Abd al-Rahman," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition 9: 811b (Gerhard Böwering).

24. These figures are listed by Nicholson in Sarraj, *al-Luma'*, xiii–xxii.

25. For a concise but up-to-date account on Kalabadhi, see "Abu Bakr Kalabadi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 1: 262–263 (W. Madelung). An English translation is available: Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Kalabadhi, *The Doctrine of the Sufis,* trans. A.J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

26. Abu Talib Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Makki, *Qut al-qulub fi mu'amalat al-mahbub wa wasf tariq al-murid ila maqam al-tawhid,* ed. Sa'id Nasib Makarim (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1995), two vols. On Makki, see John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology,* The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 33–38, and 112–263 (selections from the *Sustenance* in translation).

27. "Abu Noaym el-Esfahani," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 1: 354–355 (W. Madelung); "Abdallah al-Ansari," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 1: 187–190 (S.L. de Beaureceuil); Abu Mansur is examined by Nasrollah Purjavadi in a number of articles in Persian (too many to list here) published in the journal *Maarif* during the 1990s.

28. Ansari's works are introduced with excerpts and further references in A.G. Ravan Farhadi, *'Abdullah Ansari of Herat (1006–1089 C.E.): An Early Sufi Master* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1996). However, the best synopsis of what we know on the Arabic and Persian works associated with Ansari is Bo Utas, "The *Munajat* or *Ilahi-Namah* of 'Abdullah Ansari," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3 (1988): 83–87. The relationship between Ansari's *The Stages of Wayfarers* and Ibn al-'Arif's *The Beauties of Spiritual Sessions* is discussed in B. Halff, 'Le *Mahasin al-majalis* d'Ibn al-'Arif et l'oeuvre du soufi hanbalite al-Ansari,' *Révue des Études Islamiques* 39 (1971): 321–333. The work of Ibn al-'Arif is available in a bilingual edition: Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn al-'Arif, *Mahasin al-Majalis, The Attractions of Mystical Sessions,* trans. William Elliot and Adnan K. Abdulla (Amersham, U.K.: Avebury, 1980).

29. A section of this work is available in English translation, with an up-to-date introduction on Qushayri by Hamid Algar: 'Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism,* trans. B.R. Von Schlegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1992).

30. Qushayri, *Risala,* 738.

31. For an English translation of this work, see Ali ibn Usman Hujviri, *Revelation of the Mystery (Kashf al-Mahjub),* trans. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (Accord, New York: Pir Press, 1999); for an up-to-date account, see "Hojviri," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition 12: 429–430 (Gerhard Böwering).

32. Florian Sobieroj, "Ibn Khafif's *Kitab al-Iqtisad* and Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi's *Adab al-Muridin*: A Comparison between Two Works on the Training of Novices," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 43 (1998): 327–345.

33. Mahmud ibn 'Uthman, *Firdaws al-murshidiyya fi asrar al-samadiyya. Die Vita des Scheich Abu Ishaq al-Kazaruni,* ed. Fritz Meier (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1948), 369–390 (chapter 30).

34. These points are noted and discussed in Fritz Meier, ‘‘Qushayri’s *Tartib al-suluk*,’’ in: *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism,* John O’Kane (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 94–95 (first published in 1963); see also Fritz Meier, ‘‘Khurasan and the End of Classical Sufism,’’ in: *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism,* 190–192. These earlier works should now be read in conjunction with Laury Silvers-Alario, ‘‘The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier’s Definition of the *Shaykh al-Tarbiya* and the *Shaykh al-Ta'lim*,’’ *Muslim World* 93 (2003): 69–97.

35. Both quotes are from ‘Ali ibn Usman Hujviri, *Kashf al-mahjub,* ed. Valentin Zhukovsky (Tehran: Kitabkhana-i Tahuri, 1999), 62; see also Hujviri, *Revelation,* 55.

36. For this early phase in the development of the Sufi lodge, see the evidence assembled in the following three entries in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition: ‘‘Khankah,’’ 4: 1025a–1027a (J. Chabbi); ‘‘Ribat,’’ 8: 493b–506b (J. Chabbi); and ‘‘Zawiya,’’ 11: 466b–470a (S. Blair, J. Katz, C. Hamès).

37. Muhammad ibn al-Munawwar, *Asrar al-tawhid fi maqamat al-Shaykh Abi Sa'id,* ed. Muhammad Riza Shafi‘i Kadkani (Tehran: Muassasa-i Intisharat-i Agah, 1987), 316–317; English translation: Muhammad ibn al-Munavvar, *The Secrets of God’s Mystical Oneness,* trans. John O’Kane (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1992), 493–495.

38. Ibn al-Munavvar, *Asrar,* 1: 315–316; idem., *Secrets,* 491–493.

39. On *baraka,* see Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 101–118.

40. For a detailed discussion of the different aspects of *ziyara,* see Christopher Schurman Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston: Brill, 1999), and Niels Henrik Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya (661/1263–728/1328)* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1991).

41. Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 112.

42. Meri, *Cult,* 80–81; cf. Taylor, *Ziyara,* 87.

43. Meri, *Cult,* 117; Taylor, *Ziyara,* 83–84.

44. For detailed coverage of this subject, see the multi-authored entries in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new edition on ‘‘Tariqa,’’ 10: 243b–257b and ‘‘Tasawwuf,’’ 10: 313a–340b.

Index

‘Abbas, 221
Abbasid dynasty, 199, 202, 224; Shi‘a Islam and, 221–22, 223; Sufism under, 206, 249–50, 255
‘Abd al-Malik (imam), 168
‘Abduh, Muhammad, 157, 158
Ablutions (*wudu’*), 12, 131
Abraham, 28, 36, 105, 109–11, 112, 113; God’s promise to, 121 n.10; and the *Hajj,* 111–13; and Ishmael, 27, 28, 32, 111, 112; and the *Ka‘ba,* 16, 25, 27–28, 30, 112–113; Muhammad and, 109–10, 113, 119, 150 n.26; as submitter to God, 103, 119
Abrahamic traditions: non-Islamic, beliefs regarding, 10–11, 36, 120; prophets shared by, 10–11, 103–4, 119–120. *See also* Christianity; Judaism
Abu Bakr (caliph), 51, 192, 201, 212 n.4, 213 n.14
Abu Dawud, 133, 140
Abu Hanifa Nu‘man ibn Thabit, 136, 137, 159, 193, 214 n.20. *See also* Hanafi school of law
Abu Mansur al-Isfahani, 258, 259
Abu Muhammad Ja‘far al-Khuldi, 140
Abu Nu‘aym al-Isfahani, 140, 258, 259
Abu Sa‘id-i Abu’l-Khayr, 262–63
Abu Yazid. *See* Bayazid al-Bastami
Accepted Doctrines on the Foundations of Shari‘a (Shatibi), 175
Action(s): and faith, 192–93, 198, 204; of Muhammad, as *Sunna,* 129–30; “right” (*‘amal*), 79–80, 83
‘Ada (custom), 195–96. *See also* Custom
Adab, 88
Adam, 53, 90, 102, 108–9; fall of, 108; and the *Ka‘ba,* 16, 25
Adaptability, of *Shari‘a,* 166
‘Adl (justice), 173–75, 198
Administrative law, 151
The Adornment of the Saints (Abu Nu‘aym), 140
Al-Afghani, Jamal al-Din. *See* Jamal al-Din al-Afghani
Afterlife, 39, 54, 198
Aga Khan, 163, 235
Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), 236
Ahad (“solitary hadith”), 132, 136, 137, 142, 152–53
Ahkam (command and prohibition), 164
Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya (The Rules of Governance) (al-Mawardi), 203
Ahl al-Bayt, 218–19
Ahl al-Bida‘, 195
Ahl al-Hadith (“People of the Hadith”; Traditionists), 160, 161, 177, 195
Ahl al-hall wa’l-‘aqd, 203
Ahl al-Ikhtiyar, 203
Ahl al-Kitab (“People of the Book”), 36, 233
Ahl al-Qur’an, 132

Ahl al-Ra'y, 177, 195
Ahl al-Shi'a, 186. *See also* Shiite Islam
Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a, 186–88, 195, 211, 218; political struggles shaping, 188–93; spiritual practice, 204–8; term, 186, 187, 190. *See also* Sunni Islam
'A'isha, 41 n.11, 138, 140, 167, 176; Battle of the Camel, 190, 191
'Ajiba, Ahmad ibn, 140
Akhbar (news; reports), 137
Akhbari (traditionalist) school, 226
Alamut, 234
Alcohol drinking, 168, 204
'Ali ibn Abu Talib (imam), 213 n.14, 217, 218, 229; Battle of Siffin and, 190–91; Kharijites and, 191, 192; in Shiite Islam, 188, 192, 217–19, 229, 240; and *Sunna,* 127; in Sunni Islam, 201
'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, 221
Allah (term), 58
Allahu a'lam ("God alone knows"), 40
Allegorical interpretation (*ta'wil*), 154, 167
Almsgiving. *See* Charity
Alms Tax. *See Zakat*
'Amal ("right action"), 79–80, 83
Ambiguity, of Qur'anic language, 78–79, 86
American Muslims, 42 n.13, 142–43
Amir al-Mu'minin (commander of the faithful), 192
A-M-N (root), 33
'Amr b. al-'As, 190, 191
Analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), 167
Angel(s), 34–35, 39, 101, 120–121 n.2; Guardian, 14, 35
Angel Gabriel, 34–35, 102, 121 n.2; and Hagar, 28, 31, 35; and Mary, 122 n.18; and Qur'an, 10, 51. *See also* Hadith of the Angel Gabriel
Annunciation, 35, 122 n.18
Ansar (helpers from Medina), 201
Ansari, 'Abdallah al-, 258–59
Apostasy, 204; in Kharijite thought, 193, 213 n.13
Apostles of Jesus, 104
'Aql (human reason), 149
Arab countries, Islamic law in, 178–79
Al-'Arabi, Muhyiddin Ibn, 207–8, 265
Arabia, pre-Islamic. *See* Pre-Islamic period
Arabic language, 47, 50, 59, 94 n.19; triliteral roots, 6, 74, 80–81; verb tenses, 82. *See also* Qur'anic language
Arabic numbers, 94 n.23
Arabic poetry, 57, 59
Arabic religious sciences, 72, 73. *See also* Islamic scholarship
Arabic script, 59, 68–69
Arafat, plain of, 31, 32
Architecture, 68
Articles of Faith. *See* Pillars of Faith
Arts, Islamic. *See* Islamic arts
Al-'As, Sa'id ibn, 190
Asad, Muhammad, 121 n.5
Ascension (*mi'raj*): of Bayazid, 251; of Muhammad, 14–15
Ascetics. *See* Renunciants; Sufism
Al-Ash'ari, Abu Musa, 191, 208
'Ashur, Tahir ibn, 172
'Ashura, 220
Al-Asma' wa'l-ahkam ("the names and the decrees"), 198
Astarabadi, Muhammad Baqir, 226
At-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf (Introducing the Way of the People of Sufism) (Kalabadhi), 257
Awadh, 227
Awareness, spiritual. *See 'Ilm*
Awliya Allah ("Friends of God"), 207, 250, 254, 263–64
Awrangabadi, Jiwanji, 239
Ayat. See Signs; Verses
Ayat al-ahkam (legal verses), 152
Azar, 109
Al-Azhar University, 179
'Azra'il (Angel of Death), 121 n.2
Azraqis, 193, 213 n.13

Backbiting, 55, 61 nn.2, 3
Baghdad, Sufism in, 252–55, 256
Banks, 180
Al-Baqillani, Abu Bakr, 203
Al-Baqir, Muhammad, 221, 233
Baqir al-Anwar (Seas of Light) (Majlisi), 226
Baraka, 263
Basmalla, 67, 69, 70
Basra, 189, 190, 191, 197; Sufism in, 216 n.36, 252, 256
Al-Basri, Hasan, 207, 214 n.20, 216 n.36, 252
Battle of the Camel, 190, 191
Battle of Siffin, 190–91
Battle of Yamama, 212 n.4
Bayan al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a (Tahawi), 208–11
Bayazid al-Bastami, 250–52
The Beauties of Spiritual Sessions (al-'Arif), 259
The Beginning of Guidance (al-Ghazali), 141
Belief(s). *See* Faith; Pillars of Faith
Believer: dissident, 204; *fasiq* (malefactor), 199; Murji'a–Khariji debate, 192–93, 204. *See also* Faith
"The Believers" (*Sura* 23), 56
Benevolence. *See Ihsan*
Bible, 36; Abraham, 109; Ishmael and Isaac, 111; Moses, 113, 114–115; Muhammad, 115–116, 122 n.24; and Qur'anic interpretation, 83–84. *See also* Christianity
Bidayat al-hidaya (The Beginning of Guidance) (al-Ghazali), 141
Bihbahani, Muhammad Baqir, 226
Bilqis, Queen of Sheba, 104
Biographers (*'ulama' al-Sira*), 131
Black Stone, 25, 112
Bohras, 238
Bombay, 239
Book-making arts, 69
Buddha, 106
Bukhara, 257
Bukhari (scholar), 133, 134–35, 138
Burda (Zubayr), 206
Burhan al-Din, Sayydina Muhammad, 238–39
Burujirdi (ayatollah), 228
Buwahid sultans, 224

Cairo, 24, 139, 232
Calendar, lunar, 20–21
Caliphs, 187; Hanbali thought, 200, 201, 202; legitimacy criteria, 192–93, 197, 201–4; "rightly guided" (*Rashidun*), 202, 213 n.14; in Sunni Islam, 200, 203–4, 218
Calligraphy, 60, 68, 69
Call to religion (*da'wa*), 171
Central Asia: Shi'ism in, 224; Sufism in, 254, 257, 259, 260
Chains of transmission, 132, 133, 134, 136, 194; fabrication, 141
Charity: mandatory (*Zakat*), 17–20, 41 n.6, 53, 54, 168; voluntary (*Sadaqa*), 18–20
Children, learning of Qur'an, 59–60, 68
Christianity, 10–11, 16, 36, 120, 199–200; Adam, 108; Angel Gabriel, 34–35; Jesus, 33–34; Judgment Day, 38; submission, 104. *See also* Bible
Christians, 219, 233
Circumambulation of *Ka'ba* (*tawaf*), 29, 30, 32
Civil law: based on *Shari'a,* 177, 178–79; *mu'amalat,* 150, 151
Cleaning, ritual (*wudu'*), 12, 131
Codification stage (of Islamic law), 131
Collective *ijtihad,* 178, 179–80
Colonialism, 157, 177, 227
Colors, Qur'anic, 68–69
"Commanding the good and forbidding evil," 170, 199, 202
Community: good of (*See Public interest*); human, Qur'anic concern with, 53; of Muslims (*See Umma*); *Shari'a*'s interest in, 169
Companions of the Prophet: in Battle of the Camel, 190; era of interpretation by, 176–77; *fatwas* issued by, 135; hierarchy of, 201; on "inner *Sunna,*" 205–6; Shi'ism and,

219; and Sunna, 127–29, 136–38, 176–78, 194, 195, 214 n.19
Compilation stage (of Islamic law), 131
A Concordance of the Qur'an (Kassis), 74, 80, 84, 94 n.15
Conduct: evaluation by *fiqh,* 150; during the *Hajj,* 29; legal approaches to, 165; Qur'anic injunctions on, 54–55
Conference of the Birds ('Attar), 73
Consensus: juridical (*ijma'*), 150, 163, 171, 188, 214 n.19; "Medina," 160
Conservatism, in Islamic scholarship, 156–57
Constitutional law, 151
Constitutions, 229, 235
Contract law, 161, 162, 165
Conversion to Islam, 8, 33
Corruption (*mafsada*), 175
Covenant of God and humanity, 10, 108, 120
Creation: attitude toward, 9–10, 33, 34; as sign of God, 101, 120 n.1
Creed, Sunni, 208–11
Criminal law (*'uqubat*), 181
"The Criterion" (*al-Furqan*), 48, 56, 83
Custom ('urf; *'ada*): definitions based on, 128; as legal source, 130, 158, 160, 195–96

Daf' al-darar (prevention of harm), 176
Daily prayers, 10, 13–16, 70, 168
Da'i Mutlaq (Supreme Authority), 238
Da'is (leaders), Ismaili, 231, 238–39
'Darani, Abu Sulayman al-, 250, 252
Dariyyat (essential interests), 175–76
Daudi Bohras, 238
David, Psalms of (*al-Zabur*), 36, 113
Da'wa, 171, 221, 231
Daylami, Abu'l-Hasan al-, 255
Death, Angel of ('Azra'il), 121 n.2
Deferral of judgment, doctrine of, 192–93
Definitions, types of, 128
Definitive rulings (*qat'i*), 153
Desire, fasting and, 22–23
Destiny, 39–41, 198, 199. *See also Qadar*
Devotional conduct (*'ibadat*), 150–51, 172, 175
Dhikr, 48, 67, 71, 86; in Shi'ism, 237; in Sufism, 206, 253, 258
Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri, 250, 252
Din (religion), 7; messengers and, 105
Dissidents, 204, 213 n.13
Dissimulation, precautionary (*taqiyya*), 221
Divine Act, in Qur'anic language, 81–82
Divine inspiration (*ilham*), 49
Divine selection, 250, 252, 255
Divinization, of human, 254
Divorce law. *See*Marriage law
Al-Durar al-kamina (The Hidden Pearls) (Ibn Hajar), 139
Duties, in *Shari'a,* 150, 164–65
Dutton, Yasin, 142
D-Y-N (root), 7

Ecstatic utterances (*shath*), 251
Education: Hadith as tool of, 7; learning of Qur'an, 59–60; *madrasas,* 230, 239; *Shari'a* as tool of, 172–73; Shiite doctrine, 233
Ego: fasting and, 22–23; in Sufism, 206
Egypt, 178, 179, 231, 252, 256; law in, 178, 179
Electors, 203
"The Elephant" (*Sura* 105), 56
Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, 60, 74
Encyclopedia of Islamic Law, 179
English translations of Qur'an, 65–66, 73–74, 79, 88. *See also* Qur'anic study in English
Essential interests (*dariyyat*), 175–76
Ethics: in Qur'an, 51, 54-55. *See also* Good *vs.* evil; Morality
"The Evangel" (*al-Injil;* Gospel of Jesus), 36
Eve, 107, 108

Existential ignorance, 79
Experience: knowledge through (*ma'rifa*), 253; role in Qur'anic interpretation, 79–80
Expiations (*kaffara*), 165
The Extensive Book (al-Sarakhsi), 151

Faith (*iman*), 33; and acts, 192–93, 198, 204; and charity, 18; and fasting, 22; and free will, 198, 204; Hanbali thought on, 204, 205; Kharijite thought on, 193, 204; of leader, 192, 201–3; Mu'tazili thought on, 198–99; Pillars of, 33–41, 52–53; in Qur'an, 52–53. *See also* Believer
Family life, Qur'an in, 66, 69, 70
Faqihs (legal scholars; jurists), 128, 150, 187
Al-Farra', Abu Ya'la, 203
Fasiq (malefactor), 199
Fasting, 22, 136–37; at Ramadan (*Sawm*), 20–24, 54
Al-Fatiha ("The Opening"), 13, 77; in Muslim life, 67, 69, 70
Fatima, 137, 218, 219
Fatwa(s) (legal opinions), 154–55, 157; academy-issued, 179; collections, 180; force of, 135, 150; and *ijtihad,* 154–55; in modern times, 157, 179, 180; pragmatism in, 169; religious *vs.* objective evidence in, 164; Shafi'i school on, 161; in Shiite Islam, 196; source texts, 128, 135
Feast of Fast-Breaking (*'Id al-Fitr*), 24
Feast of Sacrifice (*'Id al-Adha*), 32, 112
Fifth Imam, 163
Fifth Pillar of Islam. *See Hajj*
Al-Fil ("The Elephant"; *Sura* 105), 56
Financial institutions, 180
Fiqh, 149–51; historical phases, 176–77; in modern times, 177–80
Al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu (Islamic Jurisprudence and Its Proofs) (al-Zuhayli), 151
First Compilation of Qur'an, 50–51
First Pillar of Islam. *See Shahada* (proclamation of faith)
First Shahada, 9–10
Fitra, 10
Five Pillars of Islam, 5, 7, 8–33; *fiqh* law based on, 150–51; *Sawm* (Ramadan fast), 20–24, 54; *Shahada* (proclamation of faith), 8–11; *Zakat* (mandatory charity), 17–20, 41 n.6, 54. *See also Hajj; Salat*
Five Values, of *Shari'a,* 164
Forbidden (*haram*), 164
Founding Sunna (*sunna mu'assisa*), 153
Fourth Imam, 162–63
Fourth Pillar of Islam. *See Sawm*
Free will, 41, 198, 199, 204
Friendship with God (*walaya*), 250, 255
"Friends of God" (*awliya Allah*), 207, 250, 254, 263–64
F-T-R (root), 10
Al-Furqan ("The Criterion"), 48, 56, 83

Gabriel, Angel of Revelation. *See* Angel Gabriel
Generations of Sufis, 256, 259
Ghadir Khumm, Muhammad's speech at, 219
Ghayba (occultation), of al-Mahdi, 223–24
Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, 140–41, 203–4, 207, 213 n.15, 258, 260
Gibb, H.A.R., 134–35
God, 8, 9–11, 33–34; as Actor, 81, 253; attributes, 34, 38, 53; covenant with, 10, 108, 120; deferral of judgment to, 192–93; determination of affairs by (*qadar*), 39–41, 198, 199; "Friends of" (*See Awliya Allah*); in ideal society, 211; immanence, 34, 198; indebtedness to, 7, 9–10; and Jesus, 116, 118–119; Judgment Day and, 38; justice of (*'adl*), 173–75, 198; in Mu'tazili thought, 197–98; names, 8, 34, 90;

oneness of (*See Tawhid*); and prophets, 37, 106—107; in Qur'an, 34, 52–53, 58–59, 81; and Qur'an as created, 199–200; Qur'an as Word of, 33–34, 49–50; reliance on (*tawakkul*), 255; sacred texts revealed by, 35–36; selection by, 250, 252, 255; in *Shahada* (proclamation of faith), 8–11; signs of (*See* Signs); Sufis and, 139–40, 206, 250, 251–52, 253–54; transcendence, 34, 197–98; Word of (*See* Revelation). *See also* Submission to will of God
God-consciousness (*taqwa*), 22, 34, 173; in Sufism, 139–40, 253, 254
Golconda, 227
Good and evil: in God's actions, 198; human choice of, 38, 41, 198; obligations regarding, 170, 199, 202. *See also* Morality
Gospel of Jesus (*al-Injil;* "The Evangel"), 36
Governmental affairs law. *See Al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya*
Greed, 18, 20, 40
Greek sciences, 197
Guardian Angels, 14, 35
Guidance, 52, 53, 218

Hadith (Word of Muhammad), 51, 59, 212 n.1; authentification, 131–35, 136–37, 141–42, 152–53; challenges to, 141–42; collections, 132–35, 138, 141, 188, 196, 200, 214–15 n.20; language of, 78–79; *mutawatir,* 152–53; Qur'an and, 153; as Qur'anic interpretation, 73; in Shiite Islam, 137–38, 163, 188, 212 n.2, 215 n.20, 219; solitary (*ahad*), 132, 136, 137, 142, 152–53; and *Sunna,* 127, 130, 136–37, 194; as teaching method, 7
Hadith of the Angel Gabriel, 7–8, 9, 34
Hadith scholars (*muhaddithun*), 128, 131–35, 136; Sufi, 140; women, 138–39
Hafsa, 138, 189, 212 n.4
Hagar, 27, 28, 31, 35
Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), 25–33, 54; events commemorated, 27–28, 111–12; history, 26, 112; rites, 28–33; social dimension, 29, 54; stampedes, 42 n.14
Al-Hajj ("The Pilgrimage"; *Sura* 22), 56
Al-Hakam, Hisham ibn, 222
Al-Hakim, Muhammad ibu 'Abdallah, 133
Halal (permissible), 152, 164, 205
Hanafa (term), 121 n.5
Hanafi school of law, 159–60, 161, 178; hadith and *Sunna,* 136, 137, 193
Hanbali school of law, 136, 161–62, 200, 214 n.19, 216 n.31; faith, 204, 205; hadith, 137; legal thought, 200–201, 214 n.19; political thought, 201–4
Hanif (true devotee), 103, 113, 121 n.5
Haqa'iq al-tafsir (Truths of Qur'anic Exegesis) (Sulami), 256
Haqq (truth; reality), 207–8, 253–64
Haram (forbidden), 152, 164, 205
Hardship, removal of (*raf' al-haraj*), 176
Harim (women's section), 13–14
Harm, prevention of (*daf' al-darar*), 176
Harut (angel), 35
Hasan (moral good), 198
Hasan (son of 'Ali), 191, 213 n.14, 219, 220
Hazm, Hakim Ibn, 18–19
Hebrew scriptures, 111. *See also al-Tawrat*
Hell, 39, 198
Herat, 138, 258
Hidden Imam, 223–24, 228–29, 240
Hijra (obligation to emigrate), 240
Hikma (wisdom), 48, 126
Hilyat al-awliya' wa tabaqat al-asfiya' (The Ornament of God's Friends

and Generations of Pure Ones) (Abu Nu'aym), 140, 258
Hims, 189
Hisba, 170
History, Qur'an as book of, 51
H-J-J (root), 25
Hud (prophet), 36, 103
Huda, 48
Al-Hujwiri, 'Ali, 19, 41 n.6, 259, 260, 262, 265
Hukm (ruling), 150
Hulul (doctrine of inherence), 254
Humanity: diversity of, and messages of prophets, 107–8; divination of, 254; of Jesus, 116, 122 n.17, 199–200; of Muhammad, 37; Qur'anic concern with, 53
Humility, 9, 13, 29
Husayn ibn 'Ali (imam), 213 n.14, 219; line, 222; martyrdom, 229–31, 240

'Ibadat (devotional conduct), 150–51, 172, 175
Ibadi school, 136
Ibadiyya, 193
Ibn 'Abbas, 127
Ibn 'Abidin, 159
Ibn Hajar al-Askalani, 139
Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad, 161, 200–204, 214 n.19, 214 n.20; *Musnad,* 133, 200. *See also* Hanbali school of law
Ibn Maja, 133
Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 172, 174, 175
'Id al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice), 32, 112
'Id al-Fitr (Feast of Fast-Breaking), 24
Idol worship, 26, 28, 109–11
"If God wills" (*in sha' Allah*), 70
Iftar (breaking of the fast), 24
Ihram (ritual purity), 28, 29, 32
Ihsan (virtue; benevolence), 34, 84–85, 91, 174
Ihya' 'ulum al-din (Revival of the Religious Sciences) (al-Ghazali), 207, 258, 260
I'jaz al-Qur'an (inimitability of Qur'an), 50
Ijma' (juridical consensus), 150, 163, 171, 188, 214 n.19
Ijma' ahl al-Medina, 160
Ijtihad (independent reasoning), 136, 150–51, 171, 175; collective, 178, 179–80; and goals, 172; historical phases, 176–77; in modern times, 157–58, 178–79, 180, 212; in Shi'ism, 226, 230, 240–41; *vs. fatwa,* 154–55
Ilham (divine inspiration), 49, 163
'Ilm (spiritual awareness), 79–80, 83, 222
'Ilm al-batin. See Internal knowledge
'Ilm al-huruf (science of letters), 94 n.23
Iltizam (unilateral stipulation), 162
Imagery, Qur'anic, 87–88, 89, 90
Imagination, 80
Imam(s), 187; earliest, 219–21; Hanbali thought on, 201, 202–3; Hidden, 223–24, 228–29, 240; Imami Shi'ism, 163, 220–21; Ismaili Shi'ism, 163, 231; Kharijite thought, 192; as legal source, 163, 196; in Nizari Shi'ism, 163, 235, 236–37; Shi'ism, 163, 196, 201, 219–21; Shi'ite doctrine, 162–63, 222, 237, 240; Sunni Islam, 203–4; Twelfth, 162–63; Twelve, 137, 163; Zaydi Shi'ism, 163, 240
Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism, 137, 162–63, 220–21, 222–31; doctrines and practices, 229–31, 241; Ja'fari school of law, 162, 221–22; modern, 227–29
Iman. See Faith
Imitation. *See Taqlid*
Imitator (*muqallid*), 213 n.15
Immanence (*tashbih*), 34, 198
Indebtedness to God, 7, 9–10
Independent reasoning. *See Ijtihad*
India, 179, 227
Individual, education of, as *Shari'a* goal, 172–73
Individualism, of *Shari'a,* 169–71
Inerrancy. *See 'Isma*

Inimitability of Qur'an, doctrine of (*i'jaz al-Qur'an*), 50
Al-Injil (Gospel of Jesus; "The Evangel"), 36
Inquisition, of al-Mamun, 199–200
In sha' Allah ("if God wills"), 70
Inspiration, divine (*ilham*), 49, 163
Intent: of Qur'an, in *Shari'a,* 167; and responsibility, 92, 165
"Intermediate state" of believer, 199
Internal knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*), 205; Sufi cultivation of, 205–6, 216 n.31, 250, 255
Interpretation. *See Tafsir; Ta'wil*
Intuition, 80, 83–84
Iran: Buwahid Sultans, 224; Ramadan, 24; Safavid dynasty, 225–26; Shi'ism, 137, 223; Shi'ism, modern Imami, 227–29; Shi'ism, Nizari Ismailis, 233–34; Sufism, 251, 254–57, 259, 260
Iraq, 189, 227–28, 254, 256
Isaac, 28, 111
Isfahan, 226, 258
Ishmael (*Isma'il*), 27, 28, 35, 103, 111, 112; and the *Ka'ba,* 16, 25, 27, 112
Islam: advent of, 26; beliefs of (*See* Pillars of Faith); conversion to, 8, 33; early, 187, 188–93, 196–204; meaning of term, 6; Pillars of (*See* Five Pillars of Islam); rituals of (*See* Ritual(s))
Islam. *See* Submission to will of God
Islamic arts: as mediator of Qur'an, 72, 73, 85, 88; Qur'anic influences on, 60, 67, 68–69; Sufi, 265
Islamic humanities. *See* Islamic arts
Islamic Ideology Council, 179
Islamicization, of non-Arab traditions, 215 n.22
Islamic Jurisprudence and Its Proofs (al-Zuhayli), 151
Islamic law, 52, 149–51; academies, 179; adaptability, 166; categories, 150–51, 215 n.30; conservatism in, 156–57; deferral of judgment doctrine, 193; early development, 194; Hanbali, 200–201; historical phases, 176–77; Imami Shiite, 226; individualism in, 169–71; interpretive approaches, 154, 158–64, 166; Ismaili Shiite, 233, 237; in modern times, 177–80; Qur'anic legal verses, 152; schools of thought (*See* Legal schools); sources of (*See* Legal sources); stages of development, 131; Sunni approach to, 188, 193, 196; *taqlid* (unquestioning imitation) in, 157, 195, 213 n.15; Westernization and, 157, 177. *See also Fiqh; Ijtihad; Shari'a*
Islamic political thought. *See* Political thought
Islamic Research Academy, 179
Islamic revivalism, 157, 177
Islamic scholarship: conservatism, 156–57; definitional categories, 128; Ismaili, 232–33; modern legal, 179–80; on prophets, 106—107; Sufi, 140, 259–60, 265. *See also* Hadith scholars; Qur'anic scholarship
Islamic state, 211; expansion of, 177, 197, 220
Islamic theology. *See Kalam*
Islamic universities, 179–80
'Isma (inerrancy): of prophets, 37, 105–6; of Qur'an, 102
Isma'il, Muhammad ibn, 223, 231
Ismaili school of law, 162, 163
Ismaili Shi'ism, 222–23, 231–39; history, 231–33; Musta'li, 163, 238–39; Nizari, 233–38; scholarship, 232–33
Israelites, 113–15, 215 n.22
Istihsan (juristic preference), 174
Istislah (public interest), 160, 161–62
Ithna 'ashariyya. *See* Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism

Jacob, 103, 111
Ja'far al-Sadiq, Abu 'Abdallah (imam), 163, 221–22, 223, 231, 233, 252

Ja'fari school of law, 136, 162, 163, 214 n.18, 221–22
Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, 157
Jamarat (Stoning Area), 42 n.14
Jamatkhanas (assembly-houses), 237–38
Jerusalem, 14, 16
Jesus, 36, 37, 105, 116–19; apostles, 104; on charity, 18; Gospel of, 36; humanity of, 116, 122 n.17, 199–200; Judgment Day and, 38; message of, 107; Muhammad and, 118–19; sinlessness of, 117, 122 n.21; virgin birth of, 117, 122 n.18; as Word of God, 33–34, 116, 199–200
Jethro (Shu'ayb), 103, 113
Jihad (struggle), 38, 170, 201
John the Baptist, 36
Jordan, 178
Joseph, 103; *Sura* of, 90
Judaism, 10–11, 16, 36, 120, 126, 233; prophetic line, 111; submission in, 104
Judgment, deferral of, doctrine of, 192–93
Judgment Day (*Yawm al-Qiyama*), 38–39
Al-Junayd, Abu al-Qasim, 140, 252, 255, 256
Juridical theorists. *See Faqihs; Muftis*
Juristic preference (*istihsan*), 174
Jurists (*faqih; qadi*), 136, 188, 202; *fatwas* and, 135, 164; Hidden Imams and, 229; independence of, 171; *Sunna* and, 128; types of, 187
Justice (*'adl*), 173–75, 198; social, in Shiite Islam, 229–30

Ka'ba, 25, 27–28, 29–30, 112; circumambulation of (*tawaf*), 29, 30, 32; early pilgrimage to, 113, 119; pilgrimage to (*See Hajj*); prayer toward, 16
Kaffara (expiations), 165
Al-Kalabadhi, Abu Bakr, 207, 257, 259
Kalam (theology): on believers, debates on, 192–93, 199, 204; emergence of, 196–97; Mu'tazila, 197–200
Kalam Allah, 48
Karbala, 220
Karim (Aga Khan), 235–36
Karima al-Marwaziyya, 138
Kashf al-Mahjuh (Uncovering the Veiled) (Hujwiri/Hujviri), 19, 260
Kazarun, 261, 263
Al-Kazaruni, Abu Ishaq, 260
Khafif, Abu 'Abdallah Ibn, 255, 261, 263
Kharijites, 127, 191, 192, 193, 213 n.10; Azraqis, 193, 213 n.13; political thought, 169–70, 188–89, 192, 201
Al-Kharraz, Abu Sa'id, 252, 253, 255
Khomeini, Ruhollah, 228–29
Kitab al-Luma (Book of Inspiration) (Sarraj), 207, 256–57
Kitab al-Mabsut (The Extensive Book) (Sarakhsi), 151
Knowledge: *fiqh,* 149; spiritual (*See 'Ilm*); in Sufism, 205–6, 250, 253, 255; types of, 205
Kufa, 191, 220, 221
Al-Kulayni, Abu Ja'far Muhammad, 222
Kuwait, 179

La hukma illa li-llah ("No decision but God's"), 190–91
Law(s): diversity of, Qur'an on, 107–108; Islamic (*See* Islamic law; *Shari'a*); Qur'an as book of, 51–52; statutory, 157, 178–79
Laylat al-Qadr ("Night of Power"), 23, 41 n.11
Leadership theory, 187–89; Hanbali, 201–4; Ismailis, 233; juristic independence, 171; Khariji, 188–89, 192; modern Sunni, 204; Musta'li, 199, 238; Shiite, 137, 162–63, 187, 188, 192, 212 n.3, 217–20, 222. *See also* Political thought

Legal opinions. *See Fatwas*
Legal rulings, types of, 150, 153
Legal scholars: *faqihs,* 128, 150, 187; *mujtahid,* 155, 156, 157, 161, 169, 230
Legal schools (*madhhab*), 136, 151, 158–64, 171, 189, 194, 214 n.18; conservatism in (taqlid), 156–57; founders, 214 n.20; on intent, 165; Ismaili, 162, 163; Ja'fari, 136, 162, 163, 214 n.18, 221–22; Maliki, 129–30, 136, 142, 160, 161, 195; Shiite, 162–63; Sunni, 189, 214 n.20; Zaydi, 136,162, 163, 240–41. *See also* Hanafi school of law; Hanbali school of law; Shafi'i school of law
Legal sources, 125, 149, 151–58, 195–96; custom as, 130, 158, 160, 195–96; *fatwas* (legal opinions) as, 154–55, 157; *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as, 136, 154–58; imams as, 163, 196; order of precedence, 135, 156; Qur'an as, 51, 149, 151–54, 156, 163; in Shiite Islam, 163; *Sunna* as, 126–28, 135–37, 149151–54, 156, 193–96, 213 n.16
Light imagery, 90
Light Verses, 69
Literature: Hadith, 132–35, 138–39, 188, 200; on Muhammad, 131; Sufi, 207–8, 255, 256–60
Lodges (*ribat*), Sufi, 255, 260–63, 264–65
Logos, Qur'an as, 82–83
Love of God, in Sufism, 206, 250, 251
Lunar calendar, 20–21

Al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ad ("The Origin and Return"), 89
*Madhhab. See*Legal schools
Madrasas, 230, 239
Mafsada (corruption), 175
Mahasin al-majalis (The Beauties of Spiritual Sessions) (Ibn al-'Arif), 259
Al-Mahdi, Muhammad (imam), 163, 223–24
Al-Mahdi ("The Guided One"), 38, 231
Al-Ma'ida ("The Table Spread"; *Sura* 5:1–3), 58
Al-Makki, Abu Talib, 207, 216 n.36, 258, 259
Maktab (Qur'an schools), 68
Malamatiyya ("People of Blame"), 254–55, 256
Malaysia, 179
Malik ibn Anas, 127, 133, 136–37, 142, 160, 169, 214 n.20
Maliki school of law, 129–30, 136, 142, 160, 161, 195
Al-Ma'mun (caliph), 199–200
Manazil al-sa'irin (The Stages of Wayfarers) (Ansari), 258–59
Al-Manzil bayn al-manzilatayn, 199
Maqasid al-Shari'a (goals of the Shari'a), 170, 171–76; education of individual, 172–73; justice, 173–75; legal interpretation based on, 158, 166, 167–68, 175; public interest (*maslaha*), 175–76
Ma'rifa (experiential knowledge), 253
Marriage law: legal schools on, 159–62, 165; mixed marriages, 171; modern, 157, 180; Pakistani, 180; polygyny, 129–30, 162; Shiite, 163
Martyrdom, in Shi'ism, 220, 229–30
Marut (angel), 35
Marwa, hill of, 28, 30–31, 42 n.14
Mary, 107, 117, 122 n.18, 21, 123 n.19, 20
Masjid (mosque), 13; *al-Aqsa* (Jerusalem), 14, 16; *al-Haram* (Mecca), 16, 256; women and, 13–14, 167–68
Maslaha (public interest), 158, 160, 169, 172, 175–76, 188
Masnavi (Rumi), 73
Mass media, 93 n.10
Masters, Sufi (*shaykhs*), 187, 260–63, 264
Al-Mawsu'a al-Fiqhiyya (*Encyclopedia of Islamic Law*), 179
Mecca: emigrants from (*Muhajirun*), 201; Muhammad in, 26, 49, 75, 76;

pilgrimage to (*See Hajj*); pre-Islamic pilgrimages to, 26, 113, 119; Sufism in, 252, 255–56. *See also Ka'ba.*
Meccan *suras,* 49, 57–58, 75, 76, 77
Medina: *Hajji* visits to, 32–33; helpers from, 201; Maliki school and, 160; Muhammad and, 26, 32–33, 49, 75, 76; practices in, as *Sunna,* 137, 194–95
"Medina consensus," 160
Medinan *suras,* 49, 57, 58, 75, 168; context challenges, 75, 76–77, 88
Meditation, 206
Men: on *Hajj,* 28–29, 32; prayer rules, 12, 13; and prophecy, 106–107
Messengers, 35, 36, 101–3; angels as, 101, 120–121 n.2; as bringers of new religion (*rasul*), 105; inerrancy of (*'isma*), 105–6; message of, 101–2, 104, 107–8, 120; number of, 106. *See also* Prophets
Michael (angel), 35
Mina, 31–32
Miracles (*mu'jizat*): of Jesus, 105, 117–18; of prophets, 105; of saints, 264
Mi'raj (ascension): of Bayazid, 251; of Muhammad, 14–15
Mongols, 224, 234
Monotheism. See Tawhid
Morality: in Khariji thought, 192, 193; *Shari'a* and, 149–50, 164–65. *See also* Good and evil
Morning Prayer, 15
Moses, 36, 56, 103, 104, 113–15; and daily prayers, 14–15
Mosque. See Masjid
Mu'amalat (civil law), 150–51
Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, 190–91, 192, 201, 220
Muftis, 128, 164, 187
Mughal empire, 227
Muhaddithun. See Hadith scholars
Muhajirun (emigrants from Mecca), 201
Muhammad, 37–38; and Abraham, 109–10, 113, 119, 150 n.26; and 'Ali, 217, 218, 219; Angel Gabriel and, 35; ascension (*Mi'raj*), 14–15; Bible and, 115–116, 122 n.24; biographers, 131; on charity, 17–18; 18–19; and daily prayers, 14–15; family, 219; Hadith of (*See* Hadith); and the *Hajj,* 31, 32–33, 113; humanity of, 37; idol worship and, 26, 109–10; on *ihsan* (spiritual virtue), 34; and Jesus, 118–19; leadership after, 218; in Mecca, 26, 49, 75, 76; and Medina, 26; 32–33, 49, 75, 76; as messenger, 105; mistakes by, 37; Moses and, 114–1115, names for, 119; as prophet, 37–38, 53, 102, 119–20; in Qur'an, 36, 37–38, 127, 219; and Ramadan, 23–24; revelation of Qur'an to, 10, 23, 41 n.11, 47, 49, 75, 102; as role model, 37–38; in Second Shahada, 10; and *Tarawih* prayers, 23, 41 n.9; tomb, 32; Way of (*See Sunna*); Word of as Hadith (*See* Hadith); in Qur'an, 49, 51
Al-Muhasibi, al-Harith Ibn Asad, 205–6, 250, 252
Mujtahid (legal scholars), 155, 156, 157, 161, 169, 230
Mumbai, 239
Al-Mu'minun ("The Believers"; *Sura* 23), 56
Munkar (angel), 35, 39
Muqallid (imitator), 213 n.15
Murji'a, 192–93, 201, 204
Musa al-Kazim, 223
Music, 67, 80–81
Muslim (Hadith scholar), 133
Muslim(s): Hebrew prophets as, 103–4; modern Western, and *Sunna,* 143–44; non–Arabic-speaking, 66, 67; as submitter to God, 6–7, 103
Muslim life: Qur'an in, 60, 66–73; *Sunna* in, 125, 143–44
Muslim World League, 179
Musnad (Hanbal), 133, 200
Musta'li Ismailis, 163, 238–39
Mutahhari, Murtaza, 228

Mutasawwif, 249
Al-Mutawakkil, Ahmad b. Sulayman, 200, 242
Mutawatir, 152–53
Mu'tazilis, 197–99, 200, 204, 216 n.36
Al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-Shari'a (Accepted Doctrines on the Foundations of Shari'a) (Shatibi), 175
Al-Muwatta' (The Trodden Path) (Malik), 127, 133, 136, 142, 160

Al-Naba' ("The Tidings"; *Sura* 78:1-17), 57–58
Nafs, 206. *See also* Ego
Al-Nafs al-Ammara (Lower Soul), 22–23
Al-Nafs al-Lawwama (Self-Blaming Soul), 22
Al-Nafs al-Mutma'inna (Soul at Peace), 22
Nahrawan, 191
Na'ini, Muhammad Husayn, 227–28
Najm al-Din Kubra, 265
Nakir (angel), 35, 39
Names: for God, 8, 34, 90; for Muhammad, 119; for Qur'an, 48, 83
"Names and the decrees" (*al-asma' wa'l-ahkam*), 198
Nasab (spiritual lineage), 261
Nasiha (sincere advice), 170–71
Nass, 222, 240
Natural world, 89. *See also* Creation
New Testament, 36
Night Journey, 140
"Night of Power" (*Laylat al-Qadr*), 23, 41 n.11
Nishapur, 256
Nizari Ismaili Shi'ism, 163, 232–38
Noah, 103, 105
"No decision but God's" (*la hukma illa li-llah*), 190–91
Non-Muslim religions, 10, 22, 106, 174. *See also* Abrahamic traditions; Christianity; Judaism
North Africa, 160
Numbers, 81, 94 n.23
Nur, 48
Nurbakhshiyya, 224
Al-Nuri, Abu'l-Husayn, 252, 253, 255
Nusus (Qur'anic injunctions), 54–55, 149, 153

Obedience, individual, 170
Obligation, to emigrate, in Zaydi Shi'ism, 240
Obligatory action (*wajib*), 175
Occultation (*ghayba*), of al-Mahdi, 223–24
OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference), 179
Old Testament, 36. *See also Al-Tawrat*
Oneness of God. *See Tawhid*
On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence (Azami), 142
"The Opening." *See Al-Fatiha*
Opinion(s): legal (*See Fatwa(s)*); personal (*ra'y*), 160, 195
Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), 179
"The Origin and Return" (*al-mabda' wa-l-ma'ad*), 89
The Origins of Islamic Law (Dutton), 142
The Ornament of God's Friends and Generations of Pure Ones (Abu Nu'aym), 258

Pakistan, 179, 180
Parables, Qur'anic, 90–91
Paradise, 39
Path of Blame, 256
Pentateuch. *See Al-Tawrat* (Torah)
"People of Blame" (*Malamatiyya*), 254–55, 256
"People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*), 36, 233
"People of God," 207–8
"People of the Hadith" (*Ahl al-Hadith*), 132, 195
"People of Remembrance," 237
Permissibility: *halal,*152, 164, 205; *ibaha,* 162

Personal opinion (*ra'y*), 160, 195
Pets, 130
Pilgrimage: to Mecca, pre-Islamic, 26, 113, 119; in Shiite practice, 230; *'Umra,* 27. *See also Hajj*
"The Pilgrimage" (*Sura* 22), 56
Pillars of Faith, 7, 33–41; angels, 34–35; Judgment Day, 38–39; oneness of God, 33–34, 52–53; prophets, 36–38, 53; *qadar,* 39–41; sacred texts, 35–36
Pillars of Islam. *See* Five Pillars of Islam
Poetry: and Qur'an, 57, 59, 67; Sufi, 206
"The Poets" (*Sura* 26), 56
Political thought: Hanbali, 201–4; individualism of Shari'a and, 169–70, 171; Ja'fari, 222; Khariji, 169–70, 188–89, 192, 201; in modern Islam, 204, 212; Murji'a, 192–93, 201; Mu'tazili theology and, 199, 200; Shiite, 187, 188, 192, 201, 222; Sunni, 187–88, 193, 201–4; and Sunni-Shi'a divide, 186–89; and theology, 192–93, 197, 211–12
Polytheism. *See* Idol worship
Pragmatism, of *Shari'a,* 168–69
Prayer. *See Salat*
Predestination, 39, 41, 198, 199. *See also Qadar*
Pre-Islamic period: idol worship, 26, 28; pilgrimage to Mecca, 26, 113, 119; poetry, 57, 59; prophets, 10–11, 103–4
Prevention of harm (*daf' al-darar*), 176
Private life, Qur'an in, 66, 69, 70
Proclamation of faith. *See Shahada*
"The Promise and the threat" (*al-wa'd wa 'l-wa'id*), 198
Prophetic stage (of Islamic law), 131, 176–77
Prophets, 10–11, 35, 36–38, 53, 101–20; descent from, in Shiite Islam, 218; elite (*uluw al-azm*), 105; followers, 104; human diversity and, 107–108; inerrancy (*'isma*), 37, 105–6; message of, 101–2, 107–8, 119; miracles, 105; number of, 105, 106; outside Abrahamic tradition, 106; pre-Islamic, 10–11, 103–4; Qur'anic stories of, 91; and revelation, 102, 105; sinlessness, 36–37; as submitters to God, 103–4, 119; *vs.* messengers (*rasul*), 105; women, 106–107; words of, status of, 49. *See also* Abraham; Jesus; Moses; Muhammad
Prostration, 12–13
Psalms of David (*al-Zabur*), 36, 113
Public interest. *See Istislah; Maslaha*
Purification, 17, 23, 27–28, 29, 32
Purification Tax. *See Zakat*

Qadar (determination by God), 39–41, 198, 199, 204
Qadi (jurists), 128, 164, 187
Qajar dynasty, 226, 227–28
Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf, 157, 168
Qasimi dynasty, 242
Qat'i rulings, 153
Qibla (direction of prayer), 16, 172–73
Qiyas (analogical reasoning), 167
Qizilbashi Shi'ism, 225
Qom, 224
Qubaysiyyat, 139
Qur'an, 33–34, 36, 47–60, 65–92, 151–52; Abraham in, 109–11; Arabic script of, 68–69; aural encounter of, 66–67; awareness–experience (*'ilm–'amal*) interplay, 79–80, 83; in Battle of Siffin, 190–91; as book, 47; on charity, 18, 20, 41 n.6; on Christians and Jews, 120; compilations, 50–51, 189–90, 212 n.4; as created, 199–200; on creation, 33, 101, 120 n.1; as education for individual, 172–73; in English, study of (*See* Qur'anic study in English); in everyday customs, 70; faith as theme, 52–53; genre, 51–52; God in, 34, 52–53, 58–59, 81–82; gradualism, 168; on greed, 18, 20, 40; as guidance, 52; Hadith and, 73,

153; on the *Hajj,* 25, 27–31; historical context, 49, 57, 75–76; *ihsan* (virtue) in, 34, 84–85, 91; imagery, 87–88, 89, 90; inerrancy (*'isma*), 102; inimitability, 50; injunctions on conduct, 54–55, 149, 153; invisible world in, 88; Jesus in, 37, 116–19; on Judgment Day, 38–39; on justice, 173–75; as legal (*Shari'a*) source, 51, 149, 151–54, 156; "literal" reading of, 79; in lives of Muslims, 60, 66–73; as Logos ("divine Word"), 82–83; meaning of term, 47–48, 66; memorization, 70, 77; on messengers, 105; monotheism in, 9, 52–53; Moses in, 113–15; Muhammad in, 36, 37–38, 127, 219; multiple meanings, 74, 78–79, 80–81; names, 48, 83; names for God, 8, 34, 90; organization and structure, 48–49, 51, 55–57, 59, 77–78, 152; on prayer (*Salat*), 15, 54; printed, 70, 93 n.8; on prophets, 36, 37, 53, 102–4, 107–8; on prophets' families, 218; public interest and, 176; and Ramadan, 20, 21–22, 23, 71; ratiocination (*ta'lil*), 167; recitation of, 13, 66–67, 69, 70–71, 189–90; as revelation, 33–34, 49–50, 83; revelation to Muhammad, 10, 23, 41 n.11, 47, 49, 75; rituals and, 54, 69–71; in Shi'ism, 163; social concerns, 53, 54; spiritual "map" of, 89; as spiritual mirror, 83, 92; stories, parables, and allusions in, 90; style, 57–60; *Sunna* and, 126–28, 153, 194; teaching of, 169; themes, 52–56, 59, 89–91, 151–52; time in, 82; translation of, 50 (*See also* Qur'an translations); unity of meaning and expression in, 80–81; visual encounter of, 68–69. *See also* *Sura(s);* Verses

Qur'an chanting (*tajwid*), 60

Qur'anic injunctions (*nusus*), 54–55, 149, 153

Qur'anic interpretation, 59, 71–73, 79, 80, 83–88; Arabic religious sciences and, 72, 73; intuition in, 80, 83–84; Islamic humanities and, 72, 73, 85; legal approaches, 154, 158, 166, 167–68; Sufi, 250. *See also* Qur'anic scholarship; Qur'anic study in English

Qur'anic language: ambiguity, 78–79, 86; audience and narrator terms, 85–86; coherence, 86–87; dialect, 190; education in, 68, 93 n.7; imagery, 87–88, 89; multiple meanings, 74, 78–79, 80–81; perspective and voice shifts, 85; pronouns, 78; punctuation, 78; study of, 72; style, 57–59, 81; symbolic correspondences, 78–79, 83, 86–87, 88, 90–91; terms of address, 85–86; time, 82; transitions, 57; triliteral roots, 6, 74, 80–81; unity with meaning, 80–81; verbal, 81–82, 94 n.24

Qur'anic recitation, 13, 66–67, 69, 70–71

Qur'anic scholarship, 47–48, 49, 60, 79; Arabic religious sciences in, 72, 73; on charity, 19; on Medinan *suras,* 76–77, 88; *tafsir,* 47, 49, 154, 167. *See also* Islamic scholarship; Qur'anic interpretation

Qur'anic study in English, 65–66, 73–92; aural encounter of Qur'an, 66–67; biblical associations, 83–85; historical contexts, 75–77, 88; interpretive principles, 83–88; interpretive traditions, 71–73; intuition, 83–84; obstacles to, 65–66, 72, 74, 75–88; order and structure, 77–78; resources, 74; spiritual virtues (*ihsan*), 84–85, 91; symbolic nature of Qur'an, 78–79; translations, 65–66, 73–74, 79, 88; unifying themes, 89–91. *See also* Qur'anic language

The Qur'an Interpreted (Arberry), 74, 79, 88

Qur'an readers, 51, 190, 212 n.4, 252

Qur'an rituals, 69–71
Qur'an schools (*maktab*), 68
Qur'an translations, English, 65–66, 73–74, 79, 88
Quraysh (*Sura* 106), 56
Quraysh tribe, 26, 190, 202, 204, 219
Al-Qushayri, Abu'l-Qasim, 207, 259–60, 262, 265
Qut al-Qulub (The Sustenance of Hearts) (Makki), 207, 216 n.36, 258

Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, 250, 252
Raf' al-haraj (removal of hardship), 176
Rahma, 48
Raka'at (movements during prayer), 12–13, 15
Ramadan, 20–24; end of, 23–24, 41 n.11; fasting (*Sawm*), 20–24, 54; Qur'an and, 23, 71; Qur'an on, 20, 21–22; as submission to will of God, 6; timing, 21–22, 23–24
Raqa'iq, 133–34
Rashidun ("rightly guided" caliphs), 202, 213 n.14
Al-Rassi, Qasim ibn Ibrahim, 241
Rasul (messenger), 105. *See also* Messengers
Ratiocination (*ta'lil*), 167
Rationalism: *Ahl al-Ra'y,* 177, 195; in Hanafi school, 159; Mu'tazili, 197–200; in Qur'an, 167; in Shafi'i school, 160; *Usili,* 226
Ra'y (personal opinion), 160, 195
Reality: of Qur'an, 82–83, 85; in Sufism, 207–8, 253–54
Reform, *Shari'a* and, 156, 168–69, 170, 176–80
Religion (*din*), 7; messengers and, 105
Religious sciences, Arabic, 72, 73
Remembrance. *See Dhikr*
"Reminders," 35101
Removal of hardship (*raf' al-haraj*), 176
Renunciants, 206, 249–52
Repentance (*tawba*), 198, 250, 254
Revelation (*wahy;* Word of God), 49; continuity, 107–8; cycle, 108, 109; Jesus as, 33–34, 116, 199–200; prophets' role in, 102, 105; Qur'an as, 33–34, 49–50; as Reality of Qur'an, 82–83; renunciants and, 250; *Shari'a* and, 149; Sunni *vs.* Shiite, 163
Revival of the Religious Sciences (al-Ghazali), 207, 258, 260
Riba (usury), 165, 180
Rida, Muhammad Rashid, 157, 158
"Right action,"79–80, 83
"Rightly guided" caliphs (*Rashidun*), 202, 213 n.14
Al-Risala (Qushayri), 207, 259–60, 262
Al-Risala (Shafi'i), 126, 128, 131, 142, 160, 196
Ritual(s): cycles, 69–70; as Five Pillars of Islam, 5, 7, 8–33; Qur'anic recitation in, 69, 70–71; Qur'an on, 54, 172–73; social dimensions, 54, 172–73; Sufi, 254, 262, 263–64, 267 n.16; in *Sunna,* 127; *ziyara,* 263–64. *See also Hajj; Salat; Sawm; Shahada; Zakat*
Rumi, Jalal al-Din, 73, 92, 265

Sabbah, Hasan-i, 233–34
Sab'iyya. *See* Ismaili Shi'ism
Sabr, 84
Sacred Mosque of Islam, 16, 256. *See also Ka'ba*
Sacred texts, 35–36. *See also* Qur'an
Sadaqa (voluntary charity), 18–20
Saddam Hussein, 228
Al-Sadiq, Ja'far. *See* Ja'far al-Sadiq
Sad maydan (Hundred Fields) (Ansari), 258
Sadr al-Din Muhammad Shirazi (Mulla Sadr), 226
Safa, hill of, 28, 30–31, 42 n.14
Safavid dynasty, 225–26
Safavid Shi'ism, 224
Sahih al-Bukhari, 133, 134–35, 138, 139
Sahih al-Muslim, 133

Sa'i, 30–31
Saint cults, 263–64, 265
Sakhawi, 139
Salama, 7
Salat (prayer), 11–16; communal, 12, 71; daily, 10, 13–16, 70, 168; direction of, 16, 172–73; for the *Hajj,* 30; in Muslim life, 69, 70; origin, 14–15, 129, 168; purpose, 172–73; in Qur'an, 15, 54; Ramadan, 23; *Tarawih,* 23, 41 n.9
Salih (prophet), 36, 103
Al-Sanhuri, 'Abd al-Razzaq, 178
Sanna (term), 194
Sarah, 28
Al-Sarakhsi, Shams al-Din, 151
Al-Sarraj, Abu Nasr, 207, 256–57, 259
Saudi Arabia, 179, 204, 239
Sawm (Ramadan fast), 20–24, 54. *See also* Ramadan
Sayf al-Din, Sayyidna Tahir, 239
Scholars. *See* Faqihs; Hadith scholars; *Mujtahid; Ulama*
Schools of law. *See* Legal schools
"Science of letters" (*'ilm al-huruf*), 94 n.23
Sciences: Arabic religious, 72, 73; Greek, 197; Islamic, 47–48
S-D-Q (root), 18
Second Compilation of Qur'an, 51, 212 n.4
Second Pillar of Islam. *See Salat*
Second Shahada, 10–11
Secular reforms, Iran, 228
Selection, divine, 250, 252, 255
Self, in Sufism, 206, 250, 253–54
Sensory imagery, 87–88, 89
Seveners. *See Ismaili Shi'ism*
Al-Shafi'i, Muhammad ibn Idris, 160, 214 n.20
Shafi'i school of law, 136, 160–61, 163, 203; on *Sunna,* 126, 128, 130, 131, 136, 141, 161, 195–96, 213 n.16, 214 n.19
Shahada (proclamation of faith), 8–11
Shaqiq al-Balkhi, 250, 252
Shari'a, 149–80; adaptability, 166, 167–68; civil codes based on, 177, 178–79; conservatism, 156–57; definition, 149; duties, 150, 164–65; as education of individual, 172–73; *fiqh* and, 149–50; Five Values, 164; goals, interpretation based on, 158, 166, 167–68; goals (*maqasid al-Shari'a*), 170, 171–76; gradualism, 168; individualism, 169–71; justice, 173–75; modern approaches, 157–58, 177–80; morality, 149–50, 164–65; Nizari Ismaili doctrine, 237–38; pragmatism, 168–69; public interest, 175–76; reform and, 156, 170, 176–80; religious *vs.* juridical duties, 150, 164–65; schools of interpretation (*See* Legal schools)sources of (*See* Legal sources). *See also* Islamic law
Shari'a (legal) definitions, 128
Shath (ecstatic utterances), 251
Al-Shatibi, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim, 154, 172, 175
Shaykhs (Sufi masters), 187, 260–63, 264
SH-H-D (root), 8
Shi'a (term), 218
Shi'at 'Ali, 191, 192, 218, 220
Shi'at Mu'awiya, 191, 192
Shiite Islam, 137–38, 186, 217–42; early history, 220–23; free will, 204; Hadith collections, 138, 163, 188, 212 n.2, 215 n.20; Imami (*See* Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism); Ismaili, 222–23, 231–40; leadership beliefs, 137, 162–63, 187, 188, 192, 212 n.3, 217–20; legal principles, 162–63, 196; legal schools, 162–63; origin of, 187–88; *Sunna* and hadith in, 137–38, 196; *vs.* Sunni Islam, 162, 163, 204, 230–31; Zaydi, 162, 163, 221, 240–42. *See also* Sunni–Shi'a divide
Shiraz, 255, 261
Al-Shu'ara' ("The Poets"; *Sura* 26), 56
Shu'ayb (Jethro) (prophet), 103, 113
"Sign(s)" (*ayat*), 35, 71; created world

as, 101, 120 n.1; and verses (*ayat*), 83, 101
Silsila (spiritual lineage), 261
Sincere advice (*nasiha*), 170–71
Sinlessness: of Jesus and Mary, 117, 122 n.21; of prophets, 36–37
Al-Sirat al-Mustaqim (The Straight Path), 10
Siyasa shar'iyya, 181, 185
S-L-A (root), 11
S-L-M (root), 6
Sobhani, Ja'far, 104–5
Social dimensions: of *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), 29, 32, 54; of Ramadan, 22; of rituals of Islam, 54, 172–73; of *Zakat* (charity), 22, 54
Society: ideal, in Islam, 211–12; Qur'anic injunctions on, 54
Solomon, 104; temple of, 14
Soul, 22; fasting and, 22–23; Sufi examination of, 205–6, 250, 252, 255
South Asia, 132, 239
Spain, Islamic, 106, 138, 140, 258–59
Speculative rulings (*zanni*), 153
Spirit, in Qur'an, 86, 89
Spiritual awareness (*'ilm*), 79–80, 83, 222
Spiritual lineages (*silsila; nasab*), 261, 262, 263
Spiritual practice, Sunni, 204–8. *See also* Sufism
Spiritual virtues. *See Ihsan*
Spiritual world, in Qur'an, 88
The Stages of Wayfarers (Ansari), 258–59
Statutory law, 157; *fiqh*-based, 178–79
Stipulation, unilateral (*iltizam*), 162
The Stoning, 32
Stoning Area (*Jamarat*), 42 n.14
"Stories," in Qur'an, 90–91
"The Straight Path" (*al-Sirat al-Mustaqim*), 10
Submission to will of God (*Islam*), 6–7, 40, 119; by Hagar, 28; and prophecy, 103–4, 119
Successors, era of, 177
Sufi (term), 206, 249, 252–53
Sufi masters (*shaykhs*), 187, 260–63, 264
Sufi orders (*tariqa; turuq*), 264–65
Sufism, 205–8, 249–66; academic, 258, 259–60, 265; Baghdad, 252–55, 256; literature, 207–8, 255, 256–60; origins, 187, 205–6, 216 n.34, 249–52; practices, 254, 262, 267 n.16; rise of masters (*shaykhs*), 260–63, 264; Shi'ism and, 224–25, 234; spread of, 255–57, 265; *Sunna* and, 139–41, 205–6, 250
Sufiyya (term), 193, 249–50, 252, 255
Al-Sulami, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman, 207, 256, 257, 259
Sulaymani Bohras, 238, 239
Sultanic rulings, 151
Sunan, 133, 140, 196
Sunna (term), 128–29, 186, 193, 194
Sunna (Way of the Prophet), 52, 110–111, 125–44, 193, 196; actions of Prophet as, 129–30; authentification, 131–37, 141–42, 152–53, 194; categories of, 129–30, 131; challenges to, 141–42; Companions of the Prophet and, 127–29, 136–38, 176–78, 194, 195, 214 n.19; definitions of, 128–29, 186, 193, 194; Founding, 153; and hadith, 127, 130, 136–37, 194; historical development, 126, 130, 131–32, 193–96; "inner," 205–6; as legal (*Shari'a*) source, 126–28, 135–37, 149, 151–54, 156, 193–96, 213 n.16; modern Western Muslims and, 143–44; public interest and, 176; Qur'an and, 126–28, 153; rituals in, 54; Shafi'i thought on, 126, 128, 130, 131, 136, 141, 161, 195–96, 213 n.16, 214 n.29; in Shiite Islam, 137–38, 163, 196, 237; statements of Prophet as, 129; Sufism and, 139–41, 205–6, 250; *vs. Sunna* as

common practice, 194–96; women and, 138–39
Sunna ghayr tashri'iyya, 196
Sunna mu'assia (Founding Sunna), 153
Sunna tashri'iyya, 196
Sunni (term), 186–87
Sunni Islam, 185–212; creed, Tahawi's rendering of, 208–11; Hadith collections, 133, 188, 200, 214–15 n.20; Hanbali thought and, 200–204; legal thought, 162, 187, 188, 196, 199–200; in modern times, 211–12; origin of, 187–212; political struggles shaping, 188–93, 199–200; political thought, 187–88, 193, 203–4; schools of law, 189, 214 n.20 (*See also* Legal schools); spiritual practice, 204–8; as term, 186–87; theological influences, 196–204; vs. Shiite Islam, 162, 163, 204, 230–31. *See also* Sufism
Sunni–Shi'a divide, 187–93, 211–12, 218; in modern times, 189
Sura(s), 48; arrangement, 51, 56–57, 77–78, 152; first (*See Al-Fatiha*); last, 55; length, 49, 77; Meccan *vs.* Medinan, 49, 57–58, 75–76, 77; numbers and "titles," 77–78
Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, 139
S-W-M (root), 20
Syria, 189, 234; modern, 139, 178, 179; Sufism in, 252, 256

Al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-tawassuf (Introduction to the School of the Sufis) (al-Kalabadhi), 207
Tabaqat al-sufiyya (Generations of Sufis), 256, 259
Tabataba'i, Muhammad Husayn, 228
"The Table Spread" (*al-Ma'ida; Sura* 5:1-3), 58
Tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis), 47, 49, 154, 167
Al-Tahawi, Abu Ja'far Ahmad, 208; Sunni creed by, 208–11
Tajwid (Qur'an chanting), 60
Takfir (unbelievers), accusations of, 204
Talha, 190, 201, 213 n.9
Ta'lil (ratiocination), 167–68
Ta'lim (Sufi instruction), 261
Tanzih (transcendence), 34, 197–98
Tanzil, 48
Al-Taqi (Muhammad al-Jawad), 223
Taqiyya (precautionary dissimulation), 221
Taqlid (imitation), 157, 195, 213 n.15
Taqwa (God-consciousness), 22, 34, 173; in Sufism, 139–40, 253, 254
Tarawih prayers, 23, 41 n.9
Tarbiyya (Sufi training), 261–62
Tariqa (path), 206, 261
Tariqa (turuq) (Sufi orders), 264–65
Tariqa Shi'ism, 224
Tasawwuf, 187, 249. *See also* Sufism
Tashbih (immanence), 34, 198
Tawaf (circumambulation of the *Ka'ba*), 29, 30, 32
Tawakkul (reliance on God), 255
Tawba (repentance), 250, 254
Tawhid (oneness of God), 9, 33, 39; Abraham and, 109–11; as fundamental message of Islam, 9, 33; in Mu'tazili rationalism, 197–98; in Qur'an, 9, 52–53; symbolized in *Ka'ba,* 28; as teaching of messengers, 103, 104
Ta'wil (allegorical interpretation), 154, 167
Al-Tawrat (Torah), 36, 115–116, 121 n.10
Tax, Alms/Purification. *See Zakat*
Tayyibi Daudis, 238
Testimony, legal, 166, 169
Textile arts, 68, 69
Theology. *See Kalam*
Third Compilation of Qur'an, 51, 189–90
Third Pillar of Islam. *See Zakat*
Throne Verse, 53, 69
"The Tidings" (*Surat al-Naba'; Sura* 78:1–17), 57–58
Time, in Qur'an, 82

Al-Tirmidhi, al-Hakim, 133, 254–55
Torah. *See Al-Tawrat*
Traditionalist literature, Sufi, 258–59
Traditionist movement (*Ahl al-Hadith*), 160, 161, 177
Training master (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*), 261–63, 264
Transcendence (*tanzih*), 34, 197–98
"The Tribe of Quraysh" (*Quraysh; Sura* 106), 56
Truth, in Sufism, 207–8
Truths of Qur'anic Exegesis (Sulami), 256
Tunisia, 232
Turkomans, 225
Al-Tustari, Sahl, 254–55, 256, 267 n.18
Twelfth Imam, 162–63
Twelve Imams, 137, 163
Twelver Shi'ism. *See* Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism

Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 189
Ulama (scholars), 131, 156, 157, 171, 200
Uluw al-Azm, 105
'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (Umayyad caliph), 168, 199
'Umar ibn al-Khattab (second caliph), 23, 167, 201, 212 n.4, 213 nn.9, 14
Umayyad dynasty, 171, 177, 192, 199, 201; and hadith, 141; renunciants, 206; Shi'ism under, 220–21
U-M-M (root), 9
Umma (community of Muslims), 9; diversity of, 107–8, 218; early, 187, 188–93, 196–204; ideal, 211–12; in modern times, 212; in Murji'a thought, 192–93; Sunni-Shi'a divide, 187–88
Umm Habiba, 138
Umm Hani Maryam, 139
Umm Salama, 138
'*Umra* (pilgrimage), 27
Unbelievers. *See Takfir*
United Arab Emirates, 178
United States, 228; Muslims in, 42 n.13, 142–43
Universities, Islamic, 179–80
Uqubat (criminal law), 151
'Urf (custom), 128, 195–96. *See also* Custom
Usili (rationalist) school, 226
Usury (*riba*), 165, 180
'Uthman b. 'Affan (caliph), 201, 213 n.14; compilation of Qur'an, 51, 189–90; Kharijites and, 192; political conflicts, 189, 219, 220

Verbs, 82, 94 n.24
Verse(s) (*ayat*), 48–49; arrangement, 51, 55–56, 77; on conduct, 54–55; division, 78; legal, 152; Light, 69; on prayer, 15; and signs (*ayat*), 83, 101; Throne, 53, 69
Vilayat-i fatqih (juristic authority), 229
Virgin birth (of Jesus), 117, 122 n.18
Virtue. *See Ihsan*
Voice, in Qur'an, 85

Al-Wa'd wa 'l-wa'id ("the promise and the threat"), 198
Wahhabis, 204, 239
Wahy. See Revelation
Wajib (obligatory action), 175
Walaya, 236, 250, 255
"We," in Qur'an, 86
Wealth, 20, 40, 54
Westernization, and Islamic law, 157, 177
Western Muslims, and *Sunna,* 143–44
Wisdom (*hikma*), 48, 126
Women: Hadith scholars, 138–39; on *Hajj,* 29, 32; mosque attendance, 167–68; prayer rules, 12, 13–14; prophets, 106–107; testimony by, 166. *See also* Marriage law
Women's section (*harim*), 13–14
Word of God. See Revelation
Word of Muhammad. See Hadith
Worship: command to, 8, 33, 34. *See also 'Ibadat*
Wudu' (ablutions), 12, 131

Yahya ibn Hamza, al-Mu'ayyad Bi'llah, 242
Yahya ibn Muadh al-Razi, 250
Al-Yaman, Hadhayfa Ibn, 189
Yathrib, 26. *See also* Medina
Al-Yawm al-Qiyama, 38–39
Yazid, 192, 220
Yemen, 238, 239, 240, 241–42
"You," in Qur'an, 85–86
Yusuf, Hajjaj Ibn, 193

Al-Zabur (Psalms of David), 36, 113
Zakat (mandatory charity; Alms Tax; Purification Tax), 17–20, 41 n.6, 54, 54, 168. *See also Sadaqa*
Zam Zam, well of, 28, 31
Zanni rulings, 153
Zarruq, Ahmad, 131
Zayd ibn 'Ali (imam), 163
Zayd ibn Thabit, 189–90, 212 n.4
Zaydi school of law, 136, 162, 163, 240–41
Ziyara, 263
Z-K-A (root), 17
Zubayr (Companion of the Prophet), 190, 201
Al-Zubayr, 'Abdallah Ibn, 190

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Contents

Voices of Islam — vii
Vincent J. Cornell

Introduction: Voices of the Spirit — xvii
Vincent J. Cornell

1. Abraham's Call: The Pilgrimage and the Call to Prayer — 1
Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

2. Prayer at the Ka'ba — 7
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

3. The Importance and Meaning of Prayer in Islam — 9
Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani

4. Vigil — 51
Barry C. McDonald

5. *Dhikr*, a Door That When Knocked, Opens: An Essay on the Remembrance of God — 53
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

6. There Was No One Like Him — 71
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

7. A Spiritual Tour of the Prophet's City (Medina) — 75
Daoud Stephen Casewit

8. Sparrow on the Prophet's Tomb — 101
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

9. In the Realm of Mercy: A Visit to a Shiite Shrine — 105
Karima Diane Alavi

10. The Passion of 'Ashura in Shiite Islam — 111
Kamran Scot Aghaie

11. The Hidden and the Most Hidden: The Heart as a Source of Spiritual Guidance 125
Shaykh ‘Ali Jum‘a

12. Evil as the Absence of the Good 131
Seyyed Hossein Nasr

13. The Blessed State of Fear: Reflections from Islam and Christianity 139
Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

14. Thomas Merton and a Sufi Saint 143
Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

15. The Sufi Way of Love and Peace 157
Nasrollah Pourjavady

16. Sufi Women's Spirituality: A Theology of Servitude 167
Rkia Elaroui Cornell

17. Fatima al-Yashrutiyya: The Life and Practice of a Sufi Woman and Teacher 175
Leslie Cadavid

18. God's Madman 201
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

19. Jihad in Islam 205
Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani

20. Letter to Mankind 257
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

Index 261

About the Editor and Contributors 279

Voices of Islam

Vincent J. Cornell

It has long been a truism to say that Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world. However, the situation expressed by this statement is more than a little ironic because Islam is also one of the most studied religions in the world, after Christianity and Judaism. In the quarter of a century since the 1978–1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, hundreds of books on Islam and the Islamic world have appeared in print, including more than a score of introductions to Islam in various European languages. How is one to understand this paradox? Why is it that most Americans and Europeans are still largely uninformed about Islam after so many books about Islam have been published? Even more, how can people still claim to know so little about Islam when Muslims now live in virtually every medium-sized and major community in America and Europe? A visit to a local library or to a national bookstore chain in any American city will reveal numerous titles on Islam and the Muslim world, ranging from journalistic potboilers to academic studies, translations of the Qur'an, and works advocating a variety of points of view from apologetics to predictions of the apocalypse.

The answer to this question is complex, and it would take a book itself to discuss it adequately. More than 28 years have passed since Edward Said wrote his classic study *Orientalism,* and it has been nearly as long since Said critiqued journalistic depictions of Islam in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. When these books first appeared in print, many thought that the ignorance about the Middle East and the Muslim world in the West would finally be dispelled. However, there is little evidence that the public consciousness of Islam and Muslims has been raised to a significant degree in Western countries. Scholars of Islam in American universities still feel the need to humanize Muslims in the eyes of their students. A basic objective of many introductory courses on Islam is to demonstrate that Muslims are rational human beings and that their beliefs are worthy of respect. As Carl W. Ernst observes in the preface to his recent work, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the*

Contemporary World, "It still amazes me that intelligent people can believe that all Muslims are violent or that all Muslim women are oppressed, when they would never dream of uttering slurs stereotyping much smaller groups such as Jews or blacks. The strength of these negative images of Muslims is remarkable, even though they are not based on personal experience or actual study, but they receive daily reinforcement from the news media and popular culture."[1]

Such prejudices and misconceptions have only become worse since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. There still remains a need to portray Muslims in all of their human diversity, whether this diversity is based on culture, historical circumstances, economic class, gender, or religious doctrine. Today, Muslims represent nearly one-fourth of the world's population. Although many Americans are aware that Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, most are surprised to learn that half of the Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan. In this sense, Islam is as much an "Asian" religion as is Hinduism or Buddhism. The new reality of global Islam strongly contradicts the "Middle Eastern" view of Islam held by most Americans. Politically, the United States has been preoccupied with the Middle East for more than half a century. Religiously, however, American Protestantism has been involved in the Middle East for more than 150 years. Thus, it comes as a shock for Americans to learn that only one-fourth of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa and that only one-fifth of Muslims are Arabs. Islam is now as much a worldwide religion as Christianity, with somewhere between 4 and 6 million believers in the United States and approximately 10 million believers in Western Europe. Almost 20 million Muslims live within the borders of the Russian Federation, and nearly a million people of Muslim descent live in the Russian city of St. Petersburg, on the Gulf of Finland.

To think of Islam as monolithic under these circumstances is both wrong and dangerous. The idea that all Muslims are fundamentalists or antidemocratic religious zealots can lead to the fear that dangerous aliens are hiding within Western countries, a fifth column of a civilization that is antithetical to freedom and the liberal way of life. This attitude is often expressed in popular opinion in both the United States and Europe. For example, it can be seen in the "Letters" section of the June 7, 2004, edition of *Time* magazine, where a reader writes: "Now it is time for Muslim clerics to denounce the terrorists or admit that Islam is fighting a war with us—a religious war."[2] For the author of this letter, Muslim "clerics" are not to be trusted, not because they find it hard to believe that pious Muslims would commit outrageous acts of terrorism, but because they secretly hate the West and its values. Clearly, for this reader of *Time,* Islam and the West are at war; however the "West" may be defined and wherever "Islam" or Muslims are to be found.

Prejudice against Muslim minorities still exists in many countries. In Russia, Muslim restaurateurs from the Caucasus Mountains must call themselves "Georgian" to stay in business. In China, being Muslim by ethnicity is acceptable, but being a Muslim by conviction might get one convicted for antistate activities. In the Balkans, Muslims in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia are called "Turks" and right-wing nationalist parties deny them full ethnic legitimacy as citizens of their countries. In India, over a thousand Muslims were killed in communal riots in Gujarat as recently as 2002. As I write these words, Israel and Hizbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political movement and militia, are engaged in a bloody conflict that has left hundreds of dead and injured on both sides. Although the number of people who have been killed in Lebanon, most of whom are Shiite civilians, is far greater than the number of those killed in Israel, television news reports in the United States do not treat Lebanese and Israeli casualties the same way. While the casualties that are caused by Hizbollah rockets in Israel are depicted as personal tragedies, Lebanese casualties are seldom personalized in this way. The truth is, of course, that all casualties of war are personal tragedies, whether the victims are Lebanese civilians, Israeli civilians, or American soldiers killed or maimed by improvised explosive devices in Iraq. In addition, all civilian deaths in war pose a moral problem, whether they are caused as a consequence of aggression or of retaliation. In many ways, depersonalization can have worse effects than actual hatred. An enemy that is hated must at least be confronted; when innocent victims are reduced to pictures without stories, they are all too easily ignored.

The problem of depersonalization has deeper roots than just individual prejudice. Ironically, the global village created by international news organizations such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News may unintentionally contribute to the problem of devaluing Muslim lives. Depictions of victimhood are often studies in incomprehension: victims speak a language the viewer cannot understand, their shock or rage strips them of their rationality, and their standard of living and mode of dress may appear medieval or even primitive when compared with the dominant cultural forms of modernity. In her classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt pointed out that the ideology of human equality, which is fostered with all good intentions by the international news media, paradoxically contributes to the visibility of difference by confusing equality with sameness. In 99 out of 100 cases, says Arendt, equality "will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is 'normal' if he is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he happens to be different. This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous."[3] According to Arendt, the widespread acceptance of the ideal of social equality after the French Revolution was a major reason why genocide,

whether of Jews in Europe, Tutsis in Rwanda, or Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, has become a characteristically modern phenomenon.

The idea of equality as sameness was not as firmly established in the United States, claimed Arendt, because the "equal opportunity" ideology of American liberalism values difference—in the form of imagination, entrepreneurship, and personal initiative—as a token of success.[4] This ideology enabled Jews in America to assert their distinctiveness and eventually to prosper in the twentieth century, and it provides an opportunity for Muslim Americans to assert their distinctiveness and to prosper today. So far, the United States has not engaged in systematic persecution of Muslims and has been relatively free of anti-Muslim prejudice. However, fear and distrust of Muslims among the general public is fostered by images of insurgent attacks and suicide bombings in Iraq, of Al Qaeda atrocities around the globe, and of increasing expressions of anti-Americanism in the Arabic and Islamic media. In addition, some pundits on talk radio, certain fundamentalist religious leaders, and some members of the conservative press and academia fan the flames of prejudice by portraying Islam as inherently intolerant and by portraying Muslims as slaves to tradition and authoritarianism rather than as advocates of reason and freedom of expression. Clearly, there is still a need to demonstrate to the American public that Muslims are rational human beings and that Islam is a religion that is worthy of respect.

Changing public opinion about Islam and Muslims in the United States and Europe will not be easy. The culture critic Guillermo Gomez-Peña has written that as a result of the opening of American borders to non-Europeans in the 1960s, the American myth of the cultural melting pot "has been replaced by a model that is more germane to the times, that of the *menudo chowder*. According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float."[5] At the present time, Muslims constitute the most visible "stubborn chunks" in the *menudo chowder* of American and European pluralism. Muslims are often seen as the chunks of the *menudo chowder* that most stubbornly refuse to "melt in." To the non-Muslim majoritarian citizen of Western countries, Muslims seem to be the most "uncivil" members of civil society. They do not dress like the majority, they do not eat like the majority, they do not drink like the majority, they do not let their women work, they reject the music and cultural values of the majority, and sometimes they even try to opt out of majoritarian legal and economic systems. In Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that left-wing pundits most love to hate. Americans, however, have been more ambivalent about Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, there have been sincere attempts to include Muslims as full partners in civil society. On the other hand, the apparent resistance of some Muslims to "fit in" creates a widespread distrust that has had legal ramifications in several notable cases.

A useful way to conceive of the problem that Muslims face as members of civil society—both within Western countries and in the global civil society that is dominated by the West—is to recognize, following Homi K. Bhabha, the social fact of Muslim *unhomeliness*. To be "unhomed," says Bhabha, is not to be homeless, but rather to escape easy assimilation or accommodation.[6] The problem is not that the "unhomed" possesses no physical home but that there is no "place" to locate the unhomed in the majoritarian consciousness. Simply put, one does not know what to make of the unhomed. Bhabha derives this term from Sigmund Freud's concept of *unheimlich,* "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."[7] Unhomeliness is a way of expressing social discomfort. When one encounters the unhomed, one feels awkward and uncomfortable because the unhomed person appears truly alien. Indeed, if there is any single experience that virtually all Muslims in Western countries share, it is that Islam makes non-Muslims uncomfortable. In the global civil society dominated by the West, Muslims are unhomed wherever they may live, even in their own countries.

This reality of Muslim experience highlights how contemporary advocates of Muslim identity politics have often made matters worse by accentuating symbolic tokens of difference between so-called Islamic and Western norms. The problem for Islam in today's global civil society is not that it is not seen. On the contrary, Islam and Muslims are arguably all too visible because they are seen as fundamentally different from the accepted norm. Like the black man in the colonial West Indies or in Jim Crow America, the Muslim is, to borrow a phrase from Frantz Fanon, "overdetermined from without."[8] Muslims have been overdetermined by the press, overdetermined by Hollywood, overdetermined by politicians, and overdetermined by culture critics. From the president of the United States to the prime minister of the United Kingdom, and in countless editorials in print and television media, leaders of public opinion ask, "What do Muslims want?" Such a question forces the Muslim into a corner in which the only answer is apologetics or defiance. To again paraphrase Fanon, the overdetermined Muslim is constantly made aware of himself or herself not just in the third person but in *triple person*. As a symbol of the unhomely, the Muslim is made to feel personally responsible for a contradictory variety of "Islamic" moral values, "Islamic" cultural expressions, and "Islamic" religious and political doctrines.[9]

In the face of such outside pressures, what the overdetermined Muslim needs most is not to be seen, but to be heard. There is a critical need for Islam to be expressed to the world not as an image, but as a narrative, and for Muslims to bear their own witness to their own experiences. The vast majority of books on Islam written in European languages, even the best ones, have been written by non-Muslims. This is not necessarily a problem, because an objective and open-minded non-Muslim can often describe Islam for a non-

Muslim audience better than a Muslim apologist. The scholars Said and Ernst, mentioned above, are both from Christian backgrounds. The discipline of Religious Studies from which Ernst writes has been careful to maintain a nonjudgmental attitude toward non-Christian religions. As heirs to the political and philosophical values of European liberalism, scholars of Religious Studies are typically dogmatic about only one thing: they must practice *epoché* (a Greek word meaning "holding back" or restraining one's beliefs) when approaching the worldview of another religion. In the words of the late Canadian scholar of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, it is not enough to act like "a fly crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl," magisterially observing another's religious practices while remaining distant from the subject. Instead, one must be more engaged in her inquiry and, through imagination and the use of *epoché,* try to find out what it feels like to be a goldfish.[10]

Through the practice of *epoché,* the field of Religious Studies has by now produced two generations of accomplished scholars of Islam in the United States and Canada. Smith himself was a fair and sympathetic Christian scholar of Islam, and his field has been more influential than any other in promoting the study of Islam in the West. However, even Smith was aware that only a goldfish truly knows what it means to be a goldfish. The most that a sympathetic non-Muslim specialist in Islamic studies can do is *describe* Islam from the perspective of a sensitive outsider. Because non-Muslims do not share a personal commitment to the Islamic faith, they are not in the best position to convey a sense of what it means to *be* a Muslim on the inside—to live a Muslim life, to share Muslim values and concerns, and to experience Islam spiritually. In the final analysis, only Muslims can fully bear witness to their own traditions from within.

The five-volume set of *Voices of Islam* is an attempt to meet this need. By bringing together the voices of nearly 50 prominent Muslims from around the world, it aims to present an accurate, comprehensive, and accessible account of Islamic doctrines, practices, and worldviews for a general reader at the senior high school and university undergraduate level. The subjects of the volumes—*Voices of Tradition; Voices of the Spirit; Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society; Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science;* and *Voices of Change*—were selected to provide as wide a depiction as possible of Muslim experiences and ways of knowledge. Taken collectively, the chapters in these volumes provide bridges between formal religion and culture, the present and the past, tradition and change, and spiritual and outward action that can be crossed by readers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims, many times and in a variety of ways. What this set does *not* do is present a magisterial, authoritative vision of an "objectively real" Islam that is juxtaposed against a supposedly inauthentic diversity of individual voices. As the Egyptian-American legal scholar and culture critic Khaled Abou El Fadl has pointed out, whenever Islam is the subject of discourse, the authoritative quickly elides into the authoritarian, irrespective of whether the voice of authority is

Muslim or non-Muslim.[11] The editors of *Voices of Islam* seek to avoid the authoritarian by allowing every voice expressed in the five-volume set to be authoritative, both in terms of individual experience and in terms of the commonalities that Muslims share among themselves.

THE EDITORS

The general editor for *Voices of Islam* is Vincent J. Cornell, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was solicited by Praeger, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing, to formulate this project, he was director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Cornell has been a Sunni Muslim for more than 30 years and is a noted scholar of Islamic thought and history. His most important book, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (1998), was described by a prepublication reviewer as "the most significant study of the Sufi tradition in Islam to have appeared in the last two decades." Besides publishing works on Sufism, Dr. Cornell has also written articles on Islamic law, Islamic theology, and moral and political philosophy. For the past five years, he has been a participant in the Archbishop of Canterbury's "Building Bridges" dialogue of Christian and Muslim theologians. In cooperation with the Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute, he is presently co-convener of a group of Muslim scholars, of whom some are contributors to *Voices of Islam,* which is working toward a new theology of the religious other in Islam. Besides serving as general editor for *Voices of Islam,* Dr. Cornell is also the volume editor for Volume 1, *Voices of Tradition;* Volume 2, *Voices of the Spirit;* and Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science.*

The associate editors for *Voices of Islam* are Omid Safi and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore. Omid Safi is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Safi, the grandson of a noted Iranian Ayatollah, was born in the United States but raised in Iran and has been recognized as an important Muslim voice for moderation and diversity. He gained widespread praise for his edited first book, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003), and was interviewed on CNN, National Public Radio, and other major media outlets. He recently published an important study of Sufi-state relations in premodern Iran, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006). Dr. Safi is the volume editor for Volume 5, *Voices of Change,* which contains chapters by many of the authors represented in his earlier work, *Progressive Muslims.*

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore has been a practicing Sunni Muslim for almost 40 years. She is director of the interfaith publishing houses Fons Vitae and Quinta Essentia and cofounder and trustee of the Islamic Texts Society of Cambridge, England. Some of the most influential families in Saudi

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THE AUTHORS

As stated earlier, *Voices of Islam* seeks to meet the need for Muslims to bear witness to their own traditions by bringing together a diverse collection of Muslim voices from different regions and from different scholarly and professional backgrounds. The voices that speak to the readers about Islam in this set come from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, and include men and women, academics, community and religious leaders, teachers, activists, and business leaders. Some authors were born Muslims and others embraced Islam at various points in their lives. A variety of doctrinal, legal, and cultural positions are also represented, including modernists, traditionalists, legalists, Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis, and "progressive Muslims." The editors of the set took care to represent as many Muslim points of view as possible, including those that they may disagree with. Although each chapter in the set was designed to provide basic information for the general reader on a particular topic, the authors were encouraged to express their individual voices of opinion and experience whenever possible.

In theoretical terms, *Voices of Islam* treads a fine line between what Paul Veyne has called "specificity" and "singularity." As both an introduction to Islam and as an expression of Islamic diversity, this set combines historical and commentarial approaches, as well as poetic and narrative accounts of individual experiences. Because of the wide range of subjects that are covered, individualized accounts (the "singular") make up much of the narrative of *Voices of Islam,* but the intent of the work is not to express individuality per se. Rather, the goal is to help the reader understand the varieties of Islamic experience (the "specific") more deeply by finding within their specificity a certain kind of generality.[12]

For Veyne, "specificity" is another way of expressing typicality or the ideal type, a sociological concept that has been a useful tool for investigating complex systems of social organization, thought, or belief. However, the problem with typification is that it may lead to oversimplification, and oversimplification is the handmaiden of the stereotype. Typification can lead to oversimplification because the concept of typicality belongs to a structure of general knowledge that obscures the view of the singular and the different. Thus,

presenting the voices of only preselected "typical Muslims" or "representative Muslims" in a work such as *Voices of Islam* would only aggravate the tendency of many Muslims and non-Muslims to define Islam in a single, essentialized way. When done from without, this can lead to a form of stereotyping that may exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the tendency to see Muslims in ways that they do not see themselves. When done from within, it can lead to a dogmatic fundamentalism (whether liberal or conservative does not matter) that excludes the voices of difference from "real" Islam and fosters a totalitarian approach to religion. Such an emphasis on the legitimacy of representation by Muslims themselves would merely reinforce the ideal of sameness that Arendt decried and enable the overdetermination of the "typical" Muslim from without. For this reason, *Voices of Islam* seeks to strike a balance between specificity and singularity. Not only the chapters in these volumes but also the backgrounds and personal orientations of their authors express Islam as a lived diversity and as a source of multiple wellsprings of knowledge. Through the use of individual voices, this work seeks to save the "singular" from the "typical" by employing the "specific."

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a major figure in the field of Subaltern Studies, notes: "Singularity is a matter of viewing. It comes into being as that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category."[13] For Chakrabarty, the singular is a necessary antidote to the typical because it "defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination."[14] Because the tendency to overdetermine and objectify Islam is central to the continued lack of understanding of Islam by non-Muslims, it is necessary to defy the generalizing impulse by demonstrating that the unity of Islam is not a unity of sameness, but of diversity. Highlighting the singularity of individual Islamic practices and doctrines becomes a means of liberating Islam from the totalizing vision of both religious fundamentalism (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) and secular essentialism. While Islam in theory may be a unity, in both thought and practice this "unity" is in reality a galaxy whose millions of singular stars exist within a universe of multiple perspectives. This is not just a sociological fact, but a theological point as well. For centuries, Muslim theologians have asserted that the Transcendent Unity of God is a mystery that defies the normal rules of logic. To human beings, unity usually implies either singularity or sameness, but with respect to God, Unity is beyond number or comparison.

In historiographical terms, a work that seeks to describe Islam through the voices of individual Muslims is an example of "minority history." However, by allowing the voices of specificity and singularity to enter into a trialogue that includes each other as well as the reader, *Voices of Islam* is also an example of "subaltern history." For Chakrabarty, subaltern narratives "are marginalized not because of any conscious intentions but because they represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional

history."[15] Subaltern narratives do not only belong to socially subordinate or minority groups, but they also belong to underrepresented groups in Western scholarship, even if these groups comprise a billion people as Muslims do. Subaltern narratives resist typification because the realities that they represent do not correspond to the stereotypical. As such, they need to be studied on their own terms. The history of Islam in thought and practice is the product of constant dialogues between the present and the past, internal and external discourses, culture and ideology, and tradition and change. To describe Islam as anything less would be to reduce it to a limited set of descriptive and conceptual categories that can only rob Islam of its diversity and its historical and intellectual depth. The best way to retain a sense of this diversity and depth is to allow Muslim voices to relate their own narratives of Islam's past and present.

NOTES

1. Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), xvii.
2. *Time,* June 7, 2004, 10.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* rev. ed. (San Diego, New York, and London: Harvest Harcourt, 1976), 54.
4. Ibid., 55.
5. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The New World (B)order," *Third Text* 21 (Winter 1992–1993): 74, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 313.
6. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 13.
7. Ibid., 14–15.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, U.K.: Pluto, 1986), 116. The original French term for this condition is *surdéterminé*. See idem, *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 128.
9. Ibid., 112.
10. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7.
11. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 9–85.
12. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology,* trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 56.
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 82.
14. Ibid., 83.
15. Ibid., 101.

Introduction: Voices of the Spirit

Vincent J. Cornell

Frithjof Schuon, whose Muslim name was Nur al-Din 'Isa and who is one of the contributors to this set in Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science,* ends his book *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* with the following reflection on prayer:

> Man prays and prayer fashions man. The saint has himself become prayer, the meeting-place of earth and Heaven; and thereby he contains the universe and the universe prays with him. He is everywhere where nature prays and he prays with her and in her: in the peaks which touch the void and eternity, in a flower which scatters its scent or in the carefree song of a bird.
> He who lives in prayer has not lived in vain.[1]

I was strongly drawn to Schuon's words from the first time I read them. However, they initially expressed to me a sentiment that was honored more in the breach than in practice. Schuon's view of prayer expresses a spirituality that is rare in today's Western religions. Whether in Judaism, Christianity, or even in much of contemporary Islam, the materialistic tenor of the times has crept into religious observance. The evangelism that pervades Sunday morning television in the United States is often materialistic, and expresses its worldliness both in its association with partisan politics and in its equation of religious virtue with worldly success. In the early 1970s, when I was a student at the University of California, Berkeley, a preacher from Oakland, California, named Reverend Ike preached a gospel of wealth that bore the motto, "You can't lose with the stuff I use." Today's gospel of prosperity in the United States may come in a more appealing package, but its message has changed very little. The equation of virtue with material success in evangelicalism has roots that go far back into the history of American Protestantism. The Catholic and Orthodox traditions of Christianity may be less overtly materialistic than Evangelical Protestantism, but they too have not emerged unscathed from the effects of materialism. In Judaism, to escape the influence of materialism, many believers approach God's commandments through an esoteric tradition such as Hasidism or Kabbalah. When more secularized

Americans seek the type of spirituality expressed in Schuon's statement, they often follow the example of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton and look not to the West but to the East—to the Dalai Lama, a Zen master, or a Hindu sage.

In the present age of late capitalism and high materiality, it often seems enough for the seeker just to find a religious message that gives practical advice on how to attain a sense of balance and harmony in one's life. This is a major reason for the popularity of preachers such as Houston Evangelist Joel Osteen, whose practical and commonsense approach to what might be called the "gospel of wellness" deals with universal principles of faith and works that are as acceptable to a Muslim or a Jew as they are to a Christian. It is also a reason why much of the religious revival in the West is moralistic and legalistic in nature, including the revival of Islam. In a complex world, the Law of God provides the most visible and easily graspable thread that can lead lost souls out of the labyrinth of modern life.

At the end of the fifteenth century CE, 'Ali Salih al-Andalusi (d. ca. 1508), a Sufi from Granada, noted that adherence to religious law is necessary for maintaining both the theological and the ethical boundaries of religion.[2] The law counteracts the weakness or inadequacy of the human being by applying basic principles of spiritual training and discipline. For this reason, many religious reform movements stress the importance of sincerity and ethical virtues and require strict obedience to God's Law. By comparison, spirituality receives less attention. According to Andalusi, religious reformers who see God's Law as the ultimate path to salvation take as their motto the phrase, "We hear and obey." It is sometimes said by such reformers in Islam that the root of *insan,* the Arabic word for "human being," is *nasiya,* "to forget." Because human beings are forgetful, they need to be reminded of God through revelation and redirected toward salvation by the Law (*Shari'a*) that God has mandated.[3]

However, there is another possible root for *insan,* which is *anisa*, "to come close." According to this understanding, human beings are close to God by nature because they are created in God's image. This view of human nature, which is common to the Sufi perspective in Islam, gives greater attention to the transcendental potential of the human spirit than does the legalistic path to religious reform. As outlined by Andalusi, a model of reform based on the Sufi view of human potential starts from the assumption that human beings are fully prepared to fulfill their role as God's representatives on Earth. The development of a greater sense of the sacred thus becomes a matter of spiritual pedagogy and character building, which supplements, rather than replaces, outward conformity to religious law. Because their view of the human being is more optimistic, such theologies of human potential often combine pedagogies of love and nurturance with disciplinary training and concentrate on the inward assimilation of divine commands without rejecting their outward practice. According to Andalusi, whereas the exoteric religious

reformer follows the dictate, "We hear and obey," the Sufi reformer responds, "We have witnessed and understand."

This Sufi theology of human potential lies behind Frithjof Schuon's notion of prayer in the selection reproduced above. The person who lives in prayer does not live in vain because she understands that prayer is more than a mere act of obedience. It is above all a means of communication between the worshipper and the Absolute, an act of communion for which every person is predisposed. According to a Holy Tradition (*hadith qudsi*) that can be found in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore's chapter on the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), "Allah Almighty says, 'I am whatever My slave thinks of Me and I am with Him when He remembers Me. When he remembers Me in himself, I remember him in Myself. If he mentions Me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly. If he comes near to Me by a hand-span, I come near to him by a cubit. If he comes near to Me by a cubit, I come near to him by a league. If he comes to Me walking, I come to him running." Commenting on this tradition, Moore's spiritual teacher, the Moroccan Sufi Muhammad ibn al-Habib, states in his collection of poems: "If the breath of God's remembrance were to fill the west and there were/A sick man in the east, that man would be cured of his affliction." In other words, and especially in today's global Islam, what the Spanish Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) called the "Breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-Rahman*) blows everywhere: when it blows in the east, it can heal the west; when it blows in the west, it can heal the east.

This volume of *Voices of Islam* is dedicated to *Voices of the Spirit* because, outside of Sufism, no aspect of Islamic thought and practice has been more overlooked in recent studies of Islam than spirituality. For most observers in Western countries, Islam embodies three traits that are antithetical to liberal views of religious expression: traditionalism, legalism, and authoritarianism. The spiritual dimension of Islam is seldom mentioned except with respect to Sufis. To a certain extent, this blindness to the spiritual side of Islam is the result of a prejudice that has existed for more than two centuries in the West. According to this view, "real" Islam (somewhat like "real" Judaism) is traditionalistic and legalistic but not deeply spiritual. When Sufi spirituality is brought up, it is usually not as a religious perspective within Islam but rather as an importation of spirituality from the outside, such as from Christian monasticism or from the Indian philosophies of Hinduism or Buddhism. Since Sufi spirituality is not seen as "real" Islam, Sufism is often treated as a separate sect or even as a de facto alternative religion. This is why some New Age practitioners of Sufism in the West feel comfortable calling themselves Sufis but refuse to identify themselves as Muslims.

More than twenty-five years ago, Edward W. Said noted in his book *Orientalism* that the European and American view of the Middle East and the Islamic world is premised on the notion of exteriority, which allows complex cultural phenomena to be simplified into discrete representations of an

artificially constructed "essence."[4] The traditions, laws, and politics of Islam are easily visible, exteriorized phenomena. As such, they can be observed and studied by the outsider and turned into symbolic representations of a "real" Islam that has been reduced to its predetermined "essential" characteristics. Spirituality, however, is premised on the notion of interiority. What is on the inside is hard to see, and what is hard to see cannot easily be observed, measured, and subjected to regimes of control and domination. If "real" Islam is exteriorized as a set of rules that determine right behavior and right belief instead of a deeper orientation toward God, it becomes easy to separate the interior aspects of Islam, such as theology and spirituality, out of Islam's supposed essence. Such an Islam would be an Islam with neither a mind (theology) nor a soul (spirituality) and hence would pose no challenge either to Western religions or to secular notions of ultimate truth.

However, the exteriorization of Islam is not just the result of a Western Orientalism that refuses to die out. Part of the blame for this situation also lies with Muslims themselves. Much of Muslim discourse today consists of an anti-Western, "clash of civilizations" type rhetoric that conceives of Islam not as a spiritual approach to the Absolute, but as an ideological system that is opposed to the hegemonic culture of Western modernity. This perspective is embodied in the title of one of the key chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb's (d. 1966) manifesto *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Signs Along the Road). Chapter 8 of Qutb's work is titled, "The Islamic Concept and Culture" (*al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa al-Thaqafa*). Qutb's *Signs Along the Road* has arguably been the most influential political manifesto since *The Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It has provided inspiration for a vast array of Islamic activists from Morocco to Malaysia, and Usama Bin Laden is perhaps its most loyal reader. The chapter "The Islamic Concept and Culture" was the inspiration for an intellectual movement known as the "Islamization of Knowledge," which is still followed in many parts of the Muslim world.[5] In this chapter, Qutb warns Muslim youths to avoid the Western sciences of sociology, cosmology, and anthropology, saying, "It is not permissible for a Muslim to learn them from anyone other than a God-fearing and pious Muslim, who knows that guidance in these matters comes from God."[6] For Qutb, the touchstone of Islamic piety is less the spiritual awareness of God as it is a means of inoculation against ideological and intellectual viruses from the West.

Lest one dismiss the exteriority of Qutb's view of Islam as the ideology of a political extremist and hence unrepresentative of Islamic reformism in general, one may also bring forward the statement of Farid Esack, a South African Muslim activist and intellectual living in the United States, who champions human rights, social and political pluralism, and intellectual freedom. In his book *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism* he states, "Despite the regular reminders of the inevitable return to God, the spiritualizing of human existence, which regards earthly life as incidental, is unfounded in the

qur'anic [*sic*] view of humankind."[7] One must ask in response to this assertion: If Islam cannot transcend the material world, then why is it called a religion and not just an ideology? The views of Qutb and Esack reflect a common tendency among Muslim reformists to reduce the religion of Islam to a system, to reduce Islamic theology to ideology, and to reduce the cultural diversity of Islam to a monoculture. In this perspective, piety is not denied per se but rather is transformed from an integral part of religion into an instrumental means of social and political liberation.

Although Muslims have long fought for social justice, modern Islamic Liberation Theologies such as those of Qutb and Esack—like the Marxist-oriented Liberation Theology that was popular in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s—are fundamentally materialistic. This is because they seek a state of political and worldly perfection that is far more un-Qur'anic than the spiritualism that Esack decries. While the Qur'an calls on believers to strive to better their condition, nowhere does it predict the return of an earthly paradise. Quite the opposite: Islamic tradition is unanimous that things will get worse as humanity approaches the End Times. Despite this fact, the quest for a social and political utopia has become a dominant theme in Islamic reformism virtually everywhere in the world. This constitutes a crisis of faith because the purpose of Islam, like that of Christianity, Judaism, and other salvation religions, is to prepare individual souls to meet God. Today, however, politically minded Islamic reformers routinely criticize Muslims who stress piety for being socially irresponsible. For the despairing Muslim pietist, it seems that Islam has not just failed to change the world but that the world has taken over Islam in the name of Islam itself. Has the notion that the believer is his brother's keeper caused Muslims to forget that the traditional legal view of Islamic society was not of a corporate entity but rather of a collection of individuals? Have Muslims forgotten the admonition of the Qur'an that "Each soul is the hostage of its own deeds" (Qur'an 74:38) and not of the deeds of the collectivity? The fate of the individual soul in Islam is not dependent on the fate of the community. The righteous person can still expect God's mercy, even if one's entire society lives in sin. And even if the whole world were to embrace Islam, it would not help a single Muslim attain salvation.

Of course, there are millions of ordinary Muslims around the world who are not political activists but are deeply pious in the ways advocated by the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. This set would be remiss if it did not include their voices too. Before modern times, it was possible to express one's piety in Islam in a variety of theological and philosophical perspectives. However, it seems that today, if one wants to find a reformist intellectual who sees piety as foundational for Islam, one must look for a person who has been exposed to Sufism, even if one is not a Sufi oneself. An example of such a reformist intellectual is Enes Kariç, Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The intellectual culture of Bosnia includes both Sufis

and non-Sufis, but it is resolutely opposed to the imposition of a single dominant interpretation of Islam. In his writings on Islam, Kariç evokes the modernist notion of an *efficient Islam*, "an Islam that would be a viable proposition in the present world, an Islam that would confer strength and respectability on its followers in the world, particularly in this part of Europe."[8] However, unlike other reformist writers, Kariç does not overlook the importance of individual piety and spirituality. If Islam is indeed a "system," Kariç observes, "It is a system of piousness. To be a Muslim transparently means to be a Muslim simply because Islam has revealed the faith through a total, wholesome practice of piousness. This mighty wave of piousness grants to Islam as a faith an ever new freshness: schools of theology may succeed one another, the legal elaboration of the Message may later be renewed, political systems may vanish, but Islam remains as piousness, Islam as commitment to the One and Only God."[9]

This statement reflects the underlying premise of *Voices of the Spirit*. Rather than viewing spirituality as an obstacle to a progressive Islamic social consciousness, the editors of *Voices of Islam* regard spirituality as the necessary ground for all religiously directed action. Not only is spirituality the soul of Islam, but it also constitutes Islam's most valuable contribution to world religions. One must not deny the importance of social justice and political action in the Islamic world, but what is one to do with the heart? If one accepts the Greek metaphor of society as a body, which was adopted by many Muslim political theorists such as the philosopher Farabi (d. 950 CE), then treating outward social ills without giving sufficient importance to the spiritual well-being of the person is as foolish as treating gangrene from outside an infection and ignoring the poison that is already circulating in the bloodstream. Even when viewed instrumentally, a sense of spirituality is undeniably important for curing the diseases of the soul. What are these diseases? Frithjof Schuon's essay once again provides the answer:

> A false life, a false death, a false activity, a false rest. A false life: passion which engenders suffering; a false death: egoism which hardens the heart and separates it from God and his mercy; a false activity: dissipation, which casts the soul into an insatiable vortex and makes it forget God, who is Peace; a false rest or a false passivity: the weakness and laziness which deliver up the soul without resistance to the countless solicitations of the world.[10]

Tragically, as can be seen in recent articles and television reports on the problem of "home-grown" Muslim terrorists in countries such as the United Kingdom and Spain, and among jihadists who have been trained by Al Qaeda or its allies, many of the most sincere and religiously committed Muslim youths have, for want of a heart and a soul in their Islam, condemned themselves to a false life, a false death, a false activity, and a false rest. The April 8, 2002, issue of *Time* magazine carried an essay on suicide terrorism by Eyad Sarraj, a secular and politically moderate Palestinian psychiatrist and founder

of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights. Sarraj asserted that young Palestinians become suicide bombers because of the shame and despair they feel at the Israeli occupation of their country. "Shame is the most painful emotion in the Arab culture," said Sarraj, "producing the feeling that one is unworthy to live. The honorable Arab is the one who refuses to suffer shame and dies in dignity."[11]

If this is indeed the motivation for suicide bombing, then Schuon's words, which were written in the 1960s, have been proved prophetic in ways that no one at that time could have imagined. A feeling of despair that causes a person to seek death is not only the sign of a false life, but it is also a grave sin in Islam, as attested by Qur'an 4:29, "Do not kill yourselves, for God is merciful to you." Killing oneself out of despair means despairing of God's mercy, which no Muslim should ever do. Suicide bombing is a false death because suicide, especially a suicide that inflicts pain and suffering on the innocent, is a selfish act of egoism, which results, as the Qur'an implies, from a hardening of the heart and a spiritual separation from God and His mercy. False activity can be found in the often strident and obsessive concern with activism for its own sake, which goes beyond the necessary struggle for social and political justice, and casts the soul, as Schuon says, "into an insatiable vortex and makes it forget God, who is Peace." Finally, the false rest or passivity that Schuon decries can be found in indoctrinated minds that abandon the will to question—which, after all, is part of the human instinct for self-preservation—and deliver up their souls to the world in a false desire for a death that they wrongly believe will be virtuous, painless, and paradisal.

Ironically, it is the converted Alsatian Muslim Frithjof Schuon, more than the secular Palestinian psychiatrist Sarraj or the born Muslim suicide bomber from Iraq, Chechnya, or the United Kingdom, who is consistent with the teachings of the Qur'an and historical Islamic tradition. Nowhere is this truer than when Schuon provides his antidote for the troubles of our times:

> To this false life is opposed a true death: the death of passion; this is a spiritual death, the cold and crystalline purity of the soul conscious of its immortality. To false death is opposed a true life: the life of the heart turned towards God and open to the warmth of his love. To false activity is opposed a true rest, a true peace: the repose of the soul which is simple and generous and content with God, the soul which turns aside from agitations and curiosity and ambition, to rest in the Divine beauty. To false rest is opposed a true activity: the battle of the spirit against the multiple weaknesses which squander the soul—and this precious life—as in a game or a dream.[12]

Despite the distortions of jihad that are committed by Muslim terrorists and suicide bombers, Muslim pietists and political activists both agree on one point: struggle in the way of God in Islam is an intensely spiritual act. This is why the chapter, "Jihad in Islam," by the Syrian-born Sufi shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani is included in this volume. Islam still retains, in a way that has become rare in the United States since the end of the civil

rights movement, the notion that struggling to establish God's justice is a path to salvation. For this reason, it is important to remind the readers, as Shaykh Kabbani does, that jihad against the unbelievers is only one of many forms of what Schuon has termed "the battle of the spirit" in Islam. Following the fourteenth-century Muslim scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Shaykh Kabbani notes that frequently encountered forms of jihad include those against hypocrisy, Satan, and the self. All of these jihads depend on a deep and profound sense of spirituality. In fact, these above three forms of jihad, if followed carefully by Muslim activists, would serve as an antidote to the distortions of jihad that are now committed in the name of Islam. The irony of political Islam is that it often seeks to win the world at the cost of the soul. As a friend of the Saudi intellectual Muhammad Asad once observed of the Wahhabi insurgents who opposed King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia for entering into treaties with non-Muslims, Muslim political extremists "are like the *jinns*...who know neither joy of life nor fear of death.... They are brave and strong in faith, no one can deny that—but all they dream about is blood and death and Paradise."[13] The ultimate tragedy for many Muslims is that they forget that such a "Paradise" is in fact Paradise lost.

This volume does not contain a complete inventory of spirituality in Islam, as it would take an entire set of volumes to produce. However, the volume was designed to provide a representative sample of spiritual perspectives, both Sufi and non-Sufi and both Sunni and Shiite. The volume begins with a reflection on prayer in Islam that links Islamic spirituality to its origins through the sacred space of the Ka'ba in Mecca and to the wide varieties of prayer that one finds in the universe of Muslim spiritual experiences. The discussion then moves to the concept of remembrance and links the remembrance of God in Islam through the formal prayer (*Salat*) and supererogatory invocation (*dhikr*) to the popular remembrance of the Prophet Muhammad, without whom the historical religion of Islam would not exist. In this section, the reader is taken from a reflection on the Prophet's inner nature, through a spiritual tour (*ziyara*) of Medina, the Prophet's City, and finally to the experience of sitting in the remembrance of the Prophet before his tomb. From the remembrance of the Prophet Muhammad, the reader is next led to the remembrance of the Prophet's descendants in Shiite Islam, through the visitation by women of the tombs of Imams and their descendants in Iran and then via a discussion of 'Ashura, the important Shiite commemoration of the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson Husayn.

From the theme of remembrance, the narrative next moves to other important spiritual themes in Islam: Shaykh 'Ali Jum'a, the Mufti of Egypt, discusses the heart as a seat of spiritual guidance; the eminent Iranian-born scholar Seyyid Hossein Nasr discusses evil in Islam as an absence of the good rather than as an actively malefic presence; and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore discusses the spiritual value of fear in the tradition of the great Spanish Sufi Abu Madyan (d. 1198 CE), who said: "Fear is a whip that urges

and restrains; it urges one toward obedience and restrains one from disobedience."[14] Next the reader is introduced to Sufi spirituality, first with a chapter that describes the Catholic monk Thomas Merton's encounter with a Sufi saint, then with a discussion of the Sufi way of love and peace by Nasrollah Pourjavady, the foremost academic specialist on Sufism in Iran. Sufi women's spirituality is explored by Rkia E. Cornell, who discusses the theology of servitude practiced by early Sufi women, and by Leslie Cadavid, who recounts the biography of Fatima al-Yashrutiyya, a twentieth-century woman Sufi master from Palestine. A more counterintuitive approach to spirituality for the Western reader is found in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore's poem about his encounter in Mecca with a man who was "attracted to God" (*majdhub*) as a moth is attracted to a flame; such a person may appear mad on the outside but is profoundly in touch with the spirit on the inside. This poetic depiction precedes the important chapter on jihad by Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, discussed above, which thoroughly discusses the inner, spiritual dimension of struggle in the way of God in Islam. The volume ends with "Letter to Mankind," another poem by Abdal-Hayy Moore that eloquently summarizes what it means for one to have experienced the spiritual dimension of Islam.

This volume of *Voices of Islam*, like the others, contains the voices of Muslims from several parts of the world, from the Arab countries of Morocco, Egypt, and Syria to Iran. However, its path also detours into the United States and includes the voices of converts to Islam who have spent large portions of their lives in the Muslim world. For the most part, this was not a conscious editorial decision but reflects the topics on which the authors who were solicited for this set wished to write. Looking back on the mix of authors, both those who were born as Muslims and those who embraced Islam by way of personal choice, one cannot help but feel that their choice of topics was more than a mere coincidence, for it reflects in very tangible terms the point made by the Moroccan Sufi Muhammad ibn al-Habib: The Breath of the All-Merciful blows in every corner of the world. If it blows in the east, it heals the west, and if it blows in the west, it heals the east. In the Introduction to Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science*, I discuss the hybridity of European and American voices of Islam and their importance as an expression of what culture theorist Homi Bhabha calls "contra-modernity." For me, "contra-modernity" is best understood as a secular and postmodern way of saying with Shyakh Ibn al-Habib that the Breath of the Merciful—the spirituality that is so essential to Islam—can blow just as strongly in the west as in the east.

Muslims who have been born into the faith should not dismiss this opinion as just another argument for an Orientalism that still seeks to dominate the Muslim world. For some nationalistic Muslims, those who have embraced Islam from other religions pose a threat to Islam, in that such "Muslims by conviction" may act as a fifth column that promotes the domination of Islam

by Western values now imposed from the inside. However, more traditionally minded Muslim scholars often have very different opinions. A little more than twenty years ago, 'Umar al-Rish, former administrator of Islamic endowments in Rabat and religious advisor to King Hassan II of Morocco, told me that in his opinion, the intellectual and spiritual future of Islam would be found in America and Europe, not in the countries that have historically been associated with Islam. Agreeing with the views of the Sufis Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn al-Habib, Sidi 'Umar believed that the effects of colonialism and the stresses of modernization would render those who lived in the so-called Muslim world insensitive to the Breath of the All-Merciful as it blew across their societies. If Islam were not to become a stranger in its own lands, he felt, it needed a re-infusion of spirituality from the countries of the West, lands whose inhabitants were already jaded with materialism and who sought a deeply spiritual perspective in their own lives.

Time will tell whether or not 'Umar al-Rish was correct. However, it is fitting to dedicate not only this volume of *Voices of Islam*, but also the entire set to his vision. This project could never have been successful without a panoply of voices from throughout the Islamic *Umma*, including those parts of the community that can be found in countries whose majorities are non-Muslim. This Introduction began with the words of Frithjof Schuon, an Alsatian Christian convert to Islam who spent most of his career in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Bloomington, Indiana. Its conclusion can be found in the words of the Saudi intellectual Muhammad Asad, who entered Islam as a Jewish reporter named Leopold Weiss for the newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Reflecting on the changes that occurred in the Islamic world from his first exposure to Islam in the 1920s to the publication of his memoir *The Road to Mecca* in the 1950s, he surmised:

> Never before...have the worlds of Islam and the West come so close to one another as today. This closeness is a struggle, visible and invisible. Under the impact of Western cultural influences, the souls of many Muslim men and women are slowly shriveling. They are letting themselves be led away from their erstwhile belief than an improvement of living standards should be but a means to improving man's spiritual perceptions; they are falling into the same idolatry of 'progress' into which the Western world fell after it reduced religion to a mere melodious tinkling somewhere in the background of happening.... If the Muslims keep their heads cool and accept progress as a means and not an end in itself, they may not only retain their own inner freedom but also, perhaps, pass on to Western man the lost secret of life's sweetness.[15]

NOTES

1. Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, trans. P.N. Townsend (1969 Eng ed., repr; Pates Manor, Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books

Limited, 1987), 223. This work was initially published in French under the title, *Perspectives Spirituelles et Faits Humains.*

2. See Abu al-Hasan ʻAli Salih al-Andalusi, *Sharh rahbat al-aman* (Rabat: Bibliothèque al-Hasaniyya (Royal Library), manuscript number 5697, 970/1562-3), 4–20. The only discussion in print of Andalusi's doctrines can be found in Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998), 213–218.

3. On the notion of the Shariʻa, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "The *Shariʻa*: Law as the Way of God," vol. 1, *Voices of Tradition.*

4. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1994 anniversary edition of 1978 original), 20–21.

5. The most significant theoretical discussion of the Islamization of Knowledge can be found in Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prologomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

6. Sayyid Qutb, *Maʻalim fi al-Tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 2000), 139; see also the English translation of this work, Seyyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-ʻIlm, n.d.), 109–110.

7. Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, U.K.: One World Books, 1997), 95.

8. Enes Kariç, "Islam in Contemporary Bosnia: A Personal Statement," in *Essays (on Behalf) of Bosnia* (Sarajevo: El Kalem, 1999), 96.

9. Enes Kariç, "The Universe of the Qur'an," in *Essays,* 168.

10. Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives*, 222.

11. Eyad Sarraj, "Why We Blow Ourselves Up," *Time*, April 8, 2002.

12. Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives*, 222.

13. Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980 revision of 1954 first edition), 237.

14. This quotation is from Abu Madyan's collection of aphorisms, "The Intimacy of the Recluse and the Pastime of the Seeker" (*Uns al-Wahid wa nuzhat al-murid*). See Vincent J. Cornell, *The Way of Abu Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abu Madyan Shuʻayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ansari (c. 509/1115–1116—594/1198)* (Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 122.

15. Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, 347–349.

1

Abraham's Call: The Pilgrimage and the Call to Prayer

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

No longer able to tolerate the community of idol worshippers in whose presence he had grown up, Abraham departed from the Sumerian town of Ur in the Euphrates river valley in about 1750 BCE. He journeyed to Palestine where he settled in Hebron, south of Bethlehem. In Arabic, Hebron is called *al-Khalil,* the City of the Friend of God. It was there that he purchased the cave of Machpeleh, where later he would be buried along with Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Leah, Jacob, and possibly Joseph. The Tomb of the Prophets in Hebron, which is revered by both Muslims and Jews, stands over the site of this cave. When Sarah, Abraham's wife, was very old and had still not been blessed with children, she suggested to Abraham—in keeping with tradition—that he marry Hagar, her Egyptian handmaiden, in the hope that there would be a child. Hagar soon bore Ishmael and it was not long before Sarah miraculously gave birth to a son, Isaac. God told Abraham that he would have two sons from whom two nations would be founded, and for this reason, Abraham must take Hagar and Ishmael to dwell in a new land. From the descendants of Sarah's son, Isaac, would come Moses and Jesus. Muhammad would come from the family of Ishmael, thereby making Abraham the father of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims.

Abraham took Hagar and Ishmael into an arid valley called Bakka, which was located on one of the great Arabian caravan routes where Mecca stands today. Abraham traveled back and forth between his two small families. On one of these visits, after Ishmael had become a young man, God commanded Abraham to rebuild, on the site of a most ancient place of worship, a sanctuary—a sacred House. This is recorded in the Qur'an: "The First House (of worship) appointed for humanity was at Bakka; a holy place and a guidance for all beings" (Qur'an 3:96).

Precise instructions were given by God as to how to build this structure for worship, called the *Ka'ba,* a word that means "cube" in the Arabic

language. In the Qur'an, God states: "Remember that We made the House a place of assembly and safety for humanity, so take the station of Abraham as a place of prayer. And we covenanted with Abraham and Ishmael that they should sanctify My House for those who circle round it, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves [therein in prayer]" (Qur'an 2:125).

When Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, Abraham prayed: "O Lord! Receive this from us; Thou, only Thou, art the All-hearing, the All-knowing. Our Lord, make us submissive unto Thee and of our seed a nation that will be submissive unto Thee. Show us our ways of worship, and turn towards us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Relenting, the Merciful. Our Lord, raise in their midst a Messenger from amongst them who shall recite unto them Thy revelations, who shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom, and shall make them grow. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Mighty, the Wise" (Qur'an 2:127–129).

After Abraham and Ishmael had completed the construction of the Ka'ba, God said to Abraham, "Proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage. Call them to come and worship Me here." There stood Abraham, in the midst of a vast and remote stretch of desert. "How far will my call reach?" he asked. God replied, "You call and it is upon Me to make it reach." Then Abraham called, "O mankind, the pilgrimage to the ancient House has been prescribed for you—so make the pilgrimage."[1]

More than 2,000 years later, in the sixth century CE, Muhammad grew up in Mecca, and, as his forefather Abraham had done in Ur, he despaired of the corruption and idolatry that had come to pervade the sacred precincts. He made meditative retreats in the cave of Hira at the summit of a mountain outside the city. On one of these retreats, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him and recited the first of the revelations of the Qur'an. Later revelations instituted the *Hajj,* or annual pilgrimage, that is incumbent on every Muslim—who is able to afford it—to make at least once in his or her lifetime. The Hajj is one of the Five Pillars of the Islamic faith.

As the pilgrim moves forward from his or her homeland in the direction of Mecca—from the time he or she walks out of the door of his or her home, travels in a car, flies in a plane, walks, or rides a donkey—he or she verbally answers the Call of Abraham, made nearly 4,000 years ago. The pilgrim repeats certain phrases, referred to as the *Talbiya,* taught by the Prophet himself:

Labbayka Allahumma labbayk,
Labbayka la sharika lak.
Labbayka.
Inna al-hamda wa an-ni'amata
Laka wa al-Mulka.
La sharika lak.

Ever at Thy service O God! Ever at Thy service!
Ever at Thy service, Thou hast no partner.
Ever at Thy service!
Surely all Praise and Blessings
And Dominion are Thine.
Thou hast no partner.[2]

The word *Labbayka,* translated as ‘‘Ever at Thy service,’’ literally means, ‘‘I am answering and responding to You (your call).’’

Upon arriving in Mecca, the pilgrim circumambulates the Ka‘ba[3] and then retires to the valley of Mina. On the Day of Arafat, he or she stands on the Plain of Arafat, amidst millions of pilgrims from all the nations of the world, asking God’s forgiveness. That evening, at sunset, the pilgrims move together through mountain passes, preparing for the next rite, which commemorates Abraham’s overcoming and rejection of the temptation to forgo sacrificing his son. These pilgrims, all humbly attired in *ihram*—a simple garb not unlike a shroud—experience there in the moonlight something like a preview of the Last Judgment. Men and women of all races are intermingled—indistinguishable as regards worldly rank. All stand together before God, who alone knows what is in their hearts.

Just as the call to pilgrimage and the response of the pilgrim are integral to this rite, so also is the *adhan,* the call to prayer in Islam. The word *adhan,* which means ‘‘call,’’ shares the same linguistic root with the words for ‘‘ear,’’ ‘‘listen,’’ and ‘‘permission.’’ When the Prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca and the severe persecutions of his birthplace in 622 CE, he settled in the town of Yathrib (Medina today). There a vision came to one of his companions, ‘Abd Allah ibn Zayd, in which the exact words of the call to prayer were given:

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar!
Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar!
Ashhadu an la ilaha illa’llah.
Ashhadu an la ilaha illa’llah.
Ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasul Allah.
Ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasul Allah.
Haya ‘ala as-sala, Haya ‘ala as-sala.
Haya ‘ala al-falah. Haya ‘ala al-falah.
Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar!
La ilaha illa’llah.

God is most great. God is most great!
God is most great. God is most great!
I testify that there is no god but God.
I testify that there is no god but God.
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.
Come to prayer. Come to prayer.
Come to salvation. Come to salvation.
God is most great. God is most great!
There is no god but God.[4]

At this time, the second mosque, the mosque now known as the Mosque of the Prophet, was being constructed in Medina. It is interesting to know that Muslims originally prayed in the direction of Jerusalem.[5] Bilal, an African who had been a slave in Mecca and endured great torture for his conversion to Islam, was chosen by the Prophet Muhammad to be the first to make the call announcing the five daily prayers. And so, today, as the sun rises and sets at ever-changing moments around the globe, the call to prayer could be said to be continuous—with one slightly overlapping the next as the earth journeys around the sun.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

The verses from the Qur'an were taken from the translation made by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Washington D.C., 1946 edition, as well as A. J. Arberry, *The Quran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

This chapter first appeared in *Parabola,* spring 1994, 61–65. It is reproduced with slight modifications in this volume with the permission of the editors of *Parabola.*

1. The phrase, ''Call of Abraham,'' comes from a statement by the Prophet Muhammad's cousin, Ibn ʻAbbas, and is found in the Qur'an commentary or *Tafsir* of Tabari: vol. 10, Surat al-Hajj 22:27.
2. These phrases repeated by the pilgrim in response to Abraham's Call are known as the *Talbiya*. The *Talbiya* is found in an authentic *hadith* (prophetic saying) reported by Muslim and others from Jabir ibn ʻAbdallah al-Ansari. See *Sahih Muslim,* ed., Muhammad Fuad ʻAbd al-Baqi (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyya 1374/1954–1955), vol. 2, 886, hadith no. 1218.
3. Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac are buried in Hebron, below the spot where a mosque stands today. It is interesting to add that Hagar (*Hajar* in Arabic) and Ishmael (*Ismaʻil*) are buried in Mecca at one side of the Kaʻba in a spot known as *Hijr Ismaʻil* (The Lap of Ishmael). ''Abraham'' in Arabic is *Ibrahim.*

4. Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 130–131.

5. Ibid., 137. A short time later, another verse of the Qur'an was revealed (Qur'an 2:144), which changed the direction of prayer toward the ''Inviolable Mosque'' (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) in Mecca.

2

Prayer at the Ka‘ba

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

Oh Lord, the orange cat lying asleep on the
shoe rack outside the Ka‘ba
looked tranquil, lean from
living wild in Mecca, but still
cat-like and sweet-faced—
surely some of this peacefulness
could come to me?

Oh Lord, You raise up giant roof-beams in the
world and
hurl great foundations
as deep as the seas—
I am only your creation of
flesh and bone,
but surely some of those
depths and heights
could be mine?

Oh Allah, I sit here facing Your House on
earth, beseeching Your Grace,
seeking Your Face,
my own not good enough in
this life,
my own face a combination of
lusty panther and
awkward ostrich
in this life,
yet I'm grateful for its
miraculous properties in
facing the world,

especially the eyes—close them
  and light spreads,
    open them and
      miracles appear—
especially Your stark square of black cloth rising
endlessly up into the night in front of me now
  but Your Face, Lord,
    could I catch a
  glimpse of it at least?

A white owl flies in the night somewhere,
its impassive face and saucer eyes
fleeing through the air.

Is this my face, Lord, or
Your Face

searching everywhere?

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Time-Warp*. Reprinted from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

3

The Importance and Meaning of Prayer in Islam

Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani

Prayer is one of the central elements of Islamic practice and worship. Indeed, it is the second of the Five Pillars of Islam and, along with the testimony of faith, the pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting the month of Ramadan, and paying the poor tax, forms the essential framework of religious life for Muslims. More than that, the observance of the ritual prayer forms the framework of each Muslim's day, from the predawn morning prayer to the night prayer that precedes sleep.

Prayer, in the ritual sense, is an obligation of the faith, to be performed five times a day by adult Muslims. According to Islamic law, prayers have a variety of obligations and conditions of observance. However, beyond the level of practice, there are spiritual conditions and aspects of prayer which represent its essence.

WHAT IS PRAYER IN ISLAM?

In the Holy Qur'an, God says:

> I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.
>
> (Qur'an 51:56)

Thus, prayer first and foremost is the response to this Divine directive to worship the Creator. Prayer represents the individual's affirmation of servanthood before the Lord of Creation and submission to His Omnipotent Will. It also represents a willing acknowledgment of our weakness and neediness by seeking Divine Grace, Mercy, Abundance, and Forgiveness. Prayer, then, is a willful, directed action by the believer, seeking direct, unmediated communication with God, for Muslims believe that every human being is of interest

to the Divine. It also represents a concrete manifestation of the Islamic conception of freewill, in that the decision to pray is one that must be made by each individual. In this way, prayer is a uniquely "human" form of worship, for all other creatures submit without question to God's Will and are engaged in His praise, glorification, and remembrance, as the Holy Qur'an asserts:

> and there is not a thing but hymneth His praise; but ye understand not their praise.
>
> (Qur'an 17:44)

Prayer, by its very nature, is a form of request or entreaty, and thus requires the full conscious participation of the one praying, with will, intellect, body, and soul. The one engaged in prayer is in direct connection with the Creator Who hears everything the supplicant says and responds—though not necessarily in the affirmative—to each request. This is the concrete manifestation of God's role as The Hearer, The Aware, and The Responsive, which represent 3 of the 99 Holy Names and Attributes of God that form the basis of the Islamic conception of the Divine.[1]

In Islam, there are two forms of prayer. One has ritual, formal requirements and manners, which are essential to its correct observance. This is called *Salat*. The other form is supplicatory prayer, and in its more general sense, represents an open-ended conversation with God, which may occur at any time or place, with few restrictions or requirements. It is called *du'a*.

Supplicatory Prayer

The term *du'a* is derived from the Arabic verb meaning "to supplicate" or "to call upon." Other similar terms for such prayer are *munaja, nida*, and *al-daru'a*.

Munaja means "a secret conversation with God," usually with the intention of seeking delivery and relief. Referring to this form of prayer, God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> Say: Who delivereth you from the darkness of the land and the sea? Ye call upon Him humbly and in secret, (saying): If we are delivered from this (fear) we truly will be of the thankful.
>
> (Qur'an 6:63)

Nida means "to call upon God while withdrawn from people." The Holy Qur'an relates the story of the Prophet Zachariah who, having no son, beseeched God in his old age to give him a successor to inherit his prophetic knowledge and duties:

> A mention of the mercy of thy Lord unto His servant Zachariah. When he cried unto his Lord a cry in secret, Saying: My Lord!...give me from Thy Presence a successor who shall inherit of me and inherit (also) of the house of Jacob... (It was said unto him): O Zachariah! Lo! We bring thee tidings of a son whose name is John; We have given the same name to none before (him).
>
> (Qur'an 19:2–7)

Al-daru'a means "a loud entreaty to God for safety," as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

> Before thee We sent (apostles) to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity, that they might submissively entreat (Him)!
>
> (Qur'an 6:42)

Ritual Prayer

The Linguistic Root of Prayer: Salat

Ritual prayer in Islam is called *Salat*, a word whose full meaning is best understood by examining its linguistic roots. One of the origins of *Salat* is the root word *silat,* which means "connection" or "contact." One of Islam's most renowned philosophers, Ibn Rushd, said:

> It derives from the word "connection" (*silat*) in that it connects the servant with his Creator, meaning that the prayer brings him near His Mercy and connects him to His Generosity and His Heavenly Paradise.[2]

This word is also used in the context of close relations (*silat al-rahim*) whose connections with an individual are due to blood ties and are therefore imperishable in the eyes of the Divine. In this sense, prayer is seen as the unseverable bond between the individual and his or her Lord.

Commenting on this, another renowned Qur'anic exegete, Qurtubi said:

> The word *Salat* derives from the word *silat*, one of the names of fire as when it is said, "The wood is burned by fire."[3]

Qurtubi attributed six different meanings to the word *Salat* in his commentary on the Holy Qur'an:

> Prayer is the invocation of God; it is mercy, as when one says, "O God, bestow prayers on Muhammad"; it is worship, as when God says, "And their worship at the (holy) House" (Qur'an 8:35); it is a supererogatory prayer, as when God says, "And enjoin upon thy people worship" (Qur'an 20:132); and it is God's praise, as when He says, "And had he

not been one of those who glorify (God)..." (Qur'an 37:143); Prayer is also recitation.[4]

RITUAL PRAYER IN DIVINE LAW (*SHARI'A*)

Ritual prayer is bound by detailed obligations and structure. It encompasses both obligatory (*fard*) prayers, which are observed five times daily at specified intervals, and voluntary prayers, which are performed by the worshipper before or after the obligatory prayers as well as at other times.

The Obligatory Nature of Ritual Prayer

The Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace and blessings,[5] called prayer "the pillar of religion." No fundamental element of Islam is stressed as much as prayer in the Holy Qur'an. Indeed, God mentions it in over 700 verses of the holy text. Among those that define its role in the religion of Islam are:

> Worship at fixed hours hath been enjoined on the believers.
>
> (Qur'an 4:103)

> Be guardians of your prayers, and of the midmost prayer.
>
> (Qur'an 2:238)

> Enjoin prayer on thy people, and be constant therein. We ask thee not to provide sustenance: We provide it for thee. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for righteousness.
>
> (Qur'an 20:132)

> Recite that which has been revealed to thee of the Book, and observe Prayer. Surely, Prayer restrains one from indecency and manifest evil, and remembrance of God indeed is the greatest virtue. And God knows what you do.
>
> (Qur'an 29:46)

> (They will be) in Gardens (of Delight): they will question each other, and (ask) of the sinners: "What led you into Hell Fire?" They will say: "We were not of those who prayed.
>
> (Qur'an 74:40–43)

The Messenger of God made ritual prayer the second of the Five Pillars of Islam:

> Islam is built on five: testifying that there is no god except God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, establishing ritual prayer, paying the poor-due, pilgrimage and fasting Ramadan.[6]

Thus, the ritual prayer is an obligation from God on every sane, adult Muslim. The Prophet said:

> The first thing about which a person will be questioned on the Day of Judgment is prayer. If it is found to be sound all his other actions will be sound as well. If his prayer is not sound all his remaining actions would be spoiled.[7]

The Prophet also said:

> Giving up prayer is tantamount to disbelief and associating partners with God.[8]

He also said:

> The one who misses one of the ritual prayers, is as if he has lost all his family and property.[9]

And he said:

> Ritual prayer is the best means of struggle in the way of God (*Jihad*).

It is reported that the Prophet's last words were:

> Prayer! Prayer! And fear God regarding those whom you are in charge of.[10]

Abu Bakr ibn al-Jaza'iri states:

> Among the wisdoms in the implementation of prayer is that it purifies and welcomes the worshipper to converse with God and His Messenger, and, while he or she remains in the material world, brings him or her into proximity with the Divine in the next life and wards off indecency and manifest evil.[11]

God's Messenger Muhammad said:

> The simile of the five prayers is like a flowing river of sweet water in front of the door of one of you, in which he plunges five times a day. What dirt will remain on him? They said, "None." He said, "Surely the five prayers eliminate sins just as water eliminates dirt."[12]

God's Messenger also said:

> Five (daily) prayers and from one Friday prayer to the (next) Friday prayer, and from Ramadan to Ramadan, are expiations for the (sins) committed in between (their intervals) provided one shuns the major sins.[13]

One of the primary aims of prayer is to prevent iniquity and vice. The Prophet of God said:

> The one whose prayer does not prevent him from iniquity and vice, gains nothing from God except remoteness.[14]

While the five prayers are an obligation, Muslims are also enjoined to perform other prayers in accordance with the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. These include

- *Witr* (the final prayer to end the day)
- The two festival (*'Id*) prayers
- The Eclipse Prayer (*Salat al-Kushuf*)
- The Prayer for Rain (*Salat al-Istisqa*)

All the above are given in established traditions of the Prophet. Other than these are what are classified as voluntary worship.[15]

In addition, there are a number of supererogatory prayers (*sunan*), which were part of the normative practice of the Prophet Muhammad, and which remain part of the everyday worship of many traditional Muslims.

History of Ritual Prayer

After the Prophet Muhammad was commissioned with prophethood in his 40th year, the first order he was given by God was to pray. It is related that the Archangel Gabriel came to him, and a spring of water gushed out from the rocks in front of them. Gabriel then showed the Prophet how to perform the ablution that is a prerequisite of the ritual prayer in Islam. Gabriel then showed the Prophet how to offer the ritual prayer to God. The Prophet then went home and showed his wife Khadija what the Archangel Gabriel had taught him.

After that, the Messenger of God began to pray two cycles (*raka'at*) of ritual prayer twice a day—once in the morning and once in the evening. From that time forward, the Prophet never went through a day without praying. In the ninth year of the Prophet's mission, he was taken by the Archangel Gabriel on a miraculous journey by night to Jerusalem and, from there, ascended to the heavens and the Divine Presence. During this

tremendous journey, God commanded the Prophet and his followers to observe the ritual prayer 50 times a day. Returning from the Divine Presence, the Prophet Muhammad met the Prophet Moses who said, "Seek a reduction, for your people cannot bear it." The Prophet did so and it was granted. After many such dialogues, the command was reduced to observe five prayers, which would be the equivalent of the original command to observe 50. For this reason, Muslims feel a great debt to the Prophet Moses for this intercession on their behalf.

Requirements of Ritual Prayer

In Divine Law (*Shariʿa*), there are a number of requirements for valid ritual prayer:

- Purification
- Time
- Direction
- Covering
- Fundaments of prayer

In addition to these essentials, there are a number of normative practices of the Prophet, which are strongly recommended as part of the ritual prayer, known as *sunna:*

- Congregation/Imamate
- Humility before the Divine (*khushuʿ*)
- Place
- Attire

Prayer Is According to the Prophetic Pattern

The practice of the Prophet is essential to understand the Holy Qur'an. God said:

> Establish prayers (*Salat*) and pay the poor-due (*Zakat*).
>
> (Qur'an 2:43)

From this, it is clear that both prayer and the poor-due are obligations. However, to find the necessary details to complete the prayer, that is, the manner and timing of the prayer and upon whom it is obligatory, and

so on, we must turn to the practice of Prophet Muhammad. Islamic doctrine states that for every single event in his lifetime God revealed to the Prophet's heart what to say and what to do. The Qur'an and the Prophetic Narrations (*ahadith*) both derive from revelation and are thus inseparable sources for understanding and implementing Islam's divine guidance.[16]

The Prophet said, "Pray as you see me pray."[17] What is meant here is to follow the method of observing prayer, both in its form and in its inward composure and states.

The Prophet used to practice the ritual prayer constantly, outside the obligatory times. In doing so he was observing God's recommendation:

> Nay, seek (God's) help with patient perseverance and prayer: It is indeed hard, except to those who bring a lowly spirit.
>
> (Qur'an 2:45)

According to the scholars of Divine Law, recommended acts are divided into three categories: those acts whose demand is confirmed, known as the "confirmed normative practice of the Prophet" (*sunan al-mu'akkada*). According to Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Masri, "Someone who neglects such an act...deserves censure and blame."[18] Second are those acts that are rewardable in Divine Law, but the one who neglects them deserves no blame. These are called the extra *sunan* (*sunna nafila*). The third category is the superlatively recommended, "meaning those acts considered part of an individual's perfections."[19] These are called the desirable acts (*mustahab*) or decorum (*adab*).

Purification

A precondition of ritual prayer in Islam is that the worshipper be in a ritually pure state and perform his or her prayer in a ritually pure location.

There are two levels of ritual impurity, each with its own remedy:

(1) *Major impurity:* This occurs as a result of menstruation, childbirth, and sexual intercourse or emission. Its remedy is ritual bathing, as prescribed in the Holy Qur'an:

> O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say,- nor in a state of ceremonial impurity (Except when travelling on the road), until after washing your whole body.
>
> (Qur'an 4:43)

(2) *Minor impurity:* This occurs due to answering the call of nature, bleeding, vomiting, or sleeping. Its remedy is ritual ablution. This, too, is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

> O you who believe! When you get ready for ritual prayer [salat], wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles.
>
> (Qur'an 5:6)

The Holy Prophet said:

> Ablution is the key to prayer as prayer is the key to Paradise.[20]

The various schools of Islamic jurisprudence differ slightly in the precise details of ritual ablution and bathing. Emphasized in all, however, is the need to use pure water, free from all contamination, for pure water contains the secret of life and of revivifying what is dead. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> We made from water every living thing.
>
> (Qur'an 21:30)

And:

> In the rain which God Sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead....
>
> (Qur'an 2:164)

If water is unavailable, extremely scarce or its use would harm the worshipper, it is permitted to perform substitute ablution using dry earth. The Holy Qur'an says:

> And if ye are sick or on a journey, or one of you cometh from the closet, or ye have had [sexual] contact with women, and ye find not water, then go to clean, high ground and rub your faces and your hands with some of it. God would not place a burden on you, but He would purify you and would perfect His grace upon you, that ye may give thanks.
>
> (Qur'an 5:6)

Besides cleansing the body, the worshipper must also take care to ensure that his or her clothes are free from impurities that would nullify the prayer. Traditionally, shoes are removed before the prayer because of their tendency to retain impurities.

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PURIFICATION

Ibn Rushd states that the word for ablution, *wudu',* derives from the word for light in Arabic, *daw,* signifying the resultant spiritual light that accrues to the one who performs it.[21]

The Messenger of God said:

> On the Day of Resurrection, my Community will be called "those with the radiant appendages" because of the traces of ablution. Therefore, whoever can increase the area of his radiance should do so.[22]

Abu Hurayra related:

> I heard my intimate friend (the Messenger of God) saying, "The radiance of the believer reaches the areas that the water of ablution reaches."[23]

Ablution signifies spiritual purity, which the Prophet was granted when the angels washed his heart, both in his youth and again, later, when angels washed it with the water of the holy well of Zam Zam on the Night of Ascension.

To gain the full benefit of ablution, the worshipper must perform it with the realization of its inner aspects, washing away the burdens and darkness of worldly life that distract him or her from Divine service. By removing both the physical and the mental filth that accumulate through the day, one ignites and seals the latent spiritual energy of one's being by means of the special attributes of water. The extremities washed during ablution are the primary means of interacting with the worldly life, and these must be cleansed of the taint left by that contact.

Ablution begins with washing the hands, signifying that the first level of spiritual energy is in the hands. Human hands contain a Divine secret, for they are a reflection of the Divine Attribute of Power, which God has bestowed in a limited degree on humankind. They provide the means for the outward manifestations of humankind's will to change its circumstances. Thus, hands are a source of change, control, and healing. No other creature has been endowed with so great an ability to manipulate its surroundings, and the hands are the main physical instrument of that ability.

The hand can act as a receiver of positive energy. The circle of the body, so clearly illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing *Ecce Homo,* is reflected on a smaller scale in the circle of the hand. Energy can be drawn in through the hands and channeled throughout the body. When one rubs the hands together during ablution, one activates a spiritual code that God has given us within our hands: the power of the 99 Beautiful Names and Attributes that God has inscribed on every person's palms.[24] The friction between the two hands creates energy in the form of heat and rubbing them together under water locks in that energy, preventing it from escaping. The water

keeps the energy that is generated by rubbing the hands together within the body, where it can be released later.

During the process of ablution the hands are used to convey the water to each other limb and organ, thereby functioning as a dispenser of that divine energy. As the limbs and organs are washed in ablution, each undergoes similar spiritual alterations based on the water, the hands and their energy, and the various movements and recitations that are part of the ablution. For the believer to benefit from the water, it must be pure and clean, otherwise its secret blessings do not reach the body.

On an esoteric level, ablution becomes a metaphor for purifying the heart. Water is always clean in its essence, so the degree of spiritual reception is dependent on keeping the water free from external impurities. If we expand the spiritual metaphor, the water symbolizes the remembrance of God. That remembrance is pure, in and of itself, but can be tainted by the darkness of negativity which derives from wrong intent, wrong will, and wrong action.

The most powerful energy we carry as human beings is our spiritual energy. Second to that is the physical energy of creativity, which manifests during the act of procreation. In the course of physically expressing this creative energy God has placed within us, we enter into a state similar to the spiritual state of annihilation, but not related to the Divine Presence; on the contrary, it is related to the lower self. When this occurs, it is essential to wash the body completely, with the intention to restore the spiritual state of purity lost during the act.

Purification of the heart blocks the influence of Satan on the believer. For this reason, the Prophet is reported to have said:

> Ablution is the weapon of the believer.[25]

Ablution protects the believer from four enemies of the soul: the lower self or ego (*nafs*), worldly desire (*hubb al-dunya*), lust (*hawa*), and Satan. However, only through the remembrance of God can the believer maintain this defense throughout the day. When the heart begins to beat with God's Holy Name, "Allah," Satan is prevented from entering, and the gossips and insinuations of the lower self are gradually reduced until they are no more than a whisper.

At an even higher level of understanding, ablution signifies the state of dissolving the self in the Divine Presence. According to the Sufi master Jili:

> ...the requirement of using water signifies that purity is not achieved except by the emergence [in the worshipper] of the manifestations of the Divine Attributes, which is the water of life, for water is the secret of life. Dry ablution (*tayammum*) as a substitute [for ablution with water] is the station of purity by necessity, and is thus a symbol of purifying one's self by opposing one's lower-self, combating the tyrannical selfish ego and spiritual exercises. However, even after someone is purified, there is still a chance for [the ego] to exist.[26]

> This is what the Prophet alluded to when he supplicated, "O my Lord give my self its piety and its purity, for You are the best one to purify it."[27] His saying "Give my self its piety," is an indication of [the need for] combating the lower-self by means of spiritual exercises. His saying "...and its purity, for You are the best one to purify it," is an indication of the heart's attraction to the Divine, for this [attraction] is far more effective than purifying by means of action and opposing the lower-self.[28]

Prayer Times

The five times of obligatory ritual prayer are

- *Fajr:* From dawn to sunrise;
- *Zuhr:* From noon until mid-afternoon;
- *Asr:* From mid-afternoon to sunset;
- *Maghrib:* From sunset to early evening;
- *Isha':* From early evening to the middle of the night.

These times coincide with the significant temporal changes that are part of each day's cycle on earth as this planet moves through its various stations in relation to the Sun. The Sun, which is the focal point of the solar system, thus becomes a guiding light for the worshiper, indicating the beginning and ending of each prayer's interval. In this way, Muslims are reminded of the story of Abraham, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

In his yearning and seeking for God, Abraham holds a metaphorical debate within himself. His first inclination is to bow before a bright star that shines forth at night, taking it as his Lord. However, when that star sets, his intellect rejects it, seeking something greater as Lord. Seeing the Moon, he determines it to be his Lord until it too sets and he seeks something greater still. Seeing the Sun rise, he supposes it must be his Lord, but despite its blazing glory, it too sets. Finally, Abraham concludes that none of these heavenly bodies—and by inference, no created thing—could be his Lord, and thus sets himself firmly on worship of the Unseen Lord:

> ...when [the sun] set he exclaimed: O my people! Lo! I am free from all that ye associate (with Him). Lo! I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters.
>
> (Qur'an 6:75–79)

Muslims consider the day to begin at sunset, with the evening (*Maghrib*) prayer. This holds tremendous significance on an esoteric, or spiritual, level. The masters of the science of Islamic spirituality, Sufism, see the cycles of prayer as symbolic of the cycles of creation itself. The sunset prayer represents

the station of leaving existence. The night prayer, which follows it, represents the station of darkness and death, annihilation, and nonexistence.

In some Islamic traditions, funeral prayers for those who have passed away during the preceding day are read immediately after the sunset prayer, indicating this time's correlation with death and the afterlife.

The Holy Qur'an says:

> It is God that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: Those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed.
>
> (Qur'an 39:42)

Awakening to pray just before dawn represents the return to life, the descent through the darkness of the womb to emerge into the light. Metaphorically, the worshipper moves from the station of nonexistence and annihilation back to the station of existence and rebirth. A new day has come, and with it the worshipper is reborn.

The apex of existence is marked by the noon prayer, which begins just as the Sun reaches the peak of brightness. At the zenith, two kingdoms are present and the prayer joins them: the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth.

The afternoon prayer takes place at a time that signifies the approach of the end, autumn, and the last era of worldly life. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad and the community of believers he raised appear at the end of humanity's spiritual history, just prior to the Day of Judgment. The coming of the afternoon prayer thus represents the approach of Judgment Day and the Divine Reckoning that it brings. With the setting of the sun, life comes to an end. The worshipper returns to God, taking with him an account of his deeds. With the darkness comes annihilation in the oceans of God's Endless Mercy. It is for this reason that Islam places a strong emphasis on the afternoon prayer.

Thus, each day is a full life cycle, from creation out of nonexistence to Judgment Day and annihilation. Each day has its birth, life, and death. In similar fashion the prayer times reflect the five major stages of life: infancy, childhood, youth, maturity, and old age.

Direction

The worshipper faces the Ka'ba, the holy shrine of Islam, as determined to the best of his or her ability by simple means. This directional focus is called the *qibla*.

The Ka'ba is the House of God, located in the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. It is the goal of the pilgrimage, which is the fifth pillar of Islam. In Islamic

teachings, the Ka'ba is said to mark the location where the Divine House in the Seventh Heaven, beyond which stands the Supreme Throne, which angels constantly circle in praise and worship of God, descended to Earth after the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were cast out of Paradise for their mistake. In the time of Noah's flood, this heavenly sanctuary was taken up to heaven again. Millennia later, Abraham and Ishmael built the Ka'ba in the same location, where it stands today, the first house of worship dedicated to God. By facing this location in prayer, each Muslim aims and hopes to reach that holy location at some point in his or her life.

Initially, in the early days of Prophet Muhammad's mission, the believers faced Jerusalem when they prayed, out of respect for the Temple there. This direction represented respect for the previous Divine dispensations brought by Moses and Jesus and the Israelite prophets. Later, Divine legislation altered the direction of prayer to face the Holy House in Mecca:

> We see thee (O Muhammad) turning of thy face for guidance to the heavens: now shall We turn thee to a prayer-direction that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque [Ka'ba]: Wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction.
>
> (Qur'an 2:144)

Thus, wherever Muslims live, their prayers have a common focus: the Ka'ba.

Because of the presence of this blessed shrine, the area surrounding the Ka'ba is holy. These environs are called the *Haram*, literally "prohibited," meaning a place where sins are prohibited. The Ka'ba itself is located within the "Prohibited Mosque," *al-Masjid al-Haram*.[29] The name Prohibited Mosque was given because no one may act on bad desires there. While it is called a mosque, God made it more than that. In reality, it is a place where sins are utterly rejected, not only in their outward forms but also in their inner realities. There, even negative thoughts and intentions are considered blameworthy. Only pure, positive desires, and good thoughts are accepted. Indeed, within the confines of that holy sanctuary, no hunting is allowed; even the cutting of trees and vegetation is proscribed.

God said in the Holy Qur'an:

> Glory to (God) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who Heareth and Seeth (all things).
>
> (Qur'an 17:1)

This verse describes the important journey that the Prophet Muhammad made between the Prohibited Mosque in Mecca and the Temple in Jerusalem

(referred to as the "Farthest Mosque," *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*[30]), a journey that in one moment bridged three divinely revealed religions.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KA'BA

One of the distinctive characteristics of Islamic ritual prayer is that the worshipper is obliged to keep his vision, both external and internal, concentrated upon the *qibla*. The focus of every worshipper is, and must be, a holy place. People whose understanding is purely external believe facing the Ka'ba is of intrinsic value.

Those with a mystic understanding know that the Ka'ba represents the spiritual pole of this world, around which all creation turns. Looking at photographs of the Ka'ba taken from above, we see the worshippers moving around it in perfectly arranged concentric circles. This assembly gathers in imitation of the heavenly kingdom, for all these circles have one center regardless of their distance from it. At the spiritual level, that center is the Divine Presence. While each worshipper faces the Ka'ba's walls of stone and mortar, these are not the focus. If we remove the four walls, what do we find? Each person facing someone else. In this is a deep and subtle secret that we leave for the reader to ponder.

When the spiritual seeker realizes his or her station on the circle of the People of the *Qibla,* he enters what is known as the Circle of Unconditional Lovers (*da'irat al-muhibbin*). That is the circle of Muslims at the first level in the way of God: the level of love. Such love is not related to any desire, but is a purely Platonic, spiritual love between the believer and his or her Lord. God is the center of the circle, and the believers are each a point on its circumference. Each has his or her own connection to the center. That means each has his or her own direction, *qibla,* toward the Divine Presence. As this connection becomes apparent to the believer, that radius becomes like a tunnel into which the seeker begins to step from the circumference of the circle. Upon making his first steps into that tunnel, he begins to discover countless negative characteristics within himself. As he discovers one characteristic after another, he begins to eliminate them, progressing down the tunnel to become a "seeker in the circle of lovers on the spiritual journey," progressing ever nearer to the *qibla* at the center. In the metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabi, the renowned mystic scholar speaks of a spiritual hierarchy in which the emanations from the Divine are received by a single human receptor who is the leader of all these circles of lovers and through him spreads to the rest of humanity, each according to his or her degree or station. This individual represents the Prophet in his or her time as the perfect servant of God. Thus, under one spiritual leader, all are moving constantly closer to the Divine Presence.

In the Sufi understanding, which delves deeply into the mystic knowledge and symbolism of Islam's outward forms, it is said that the Prohibited

Mosque represents the heart of the believer. Thus, the inner direction of prayer is toward the sanctified heart. What is the sanctified heart? At the first level of spirituality, the sanctified heart is the heart that is purified of all wrong thoughts, negativity, and dark intent. This level is called the Level of the Secret (*sirr*). Once that secret is opened within the sanctified heart, the seeker moves to the heart of the heart, known as Secret of the Secret (*sirr al-sirr*). This is the level of purification from any attachment to worldly desires. Beyond these levels of the heart are "the Hidden" (*khafa*) and "the Innermost" (*akhfa*) levels, representing further stations of purity, in which the heart becomes ever more removed from attachments, turning away from all that is worldly to focus instead on the spiritual realm of the Hereafter. At the highest level, the heart turns away from even that and begins to focus solely on the Divine Presence.

These are levels of achievement. On the spiritual dimension, the believer's focus is to reach a perfected level of character, to learn from it and to be enlightened from it. In order to progress beyond our state of ignorance we must strive to learn and educate ourselves. This can only be accomplished by keeping the company of enlightened individuals who have successfully traversed the Path of God, to God, and who are granted the ability to guide others. God says:

> O ye who believe! Fear God and be with those who are true (in word and deed).
>
> (Qur'an 9:119)

God is aware of every heart. The Holy Qur'an states:

> Those who struggle for Us, We will guide them in the right ways, the ways that are suitable to them.
>
> (Qur'an 29:69)

The polished heart of the sincere and true believer (*sadiq*) is a receptacle for God's Heavenly Lights and Divine Blessings. Such a person is like the sun. When the sun rises, the whole world shines from that source of energy and light, the light of mystical gnosis that makes all things visible. For that reason, the Prophet said, "The heart of the [true] believer is the House of the Lord."

Covering

The Islamic schools of jurisprudence concur that it is essential (*wajib*) for both men and women to cover those parts of their bodies during prayer which should ordinarily be kept covered before strangers. For men, this

includes what is between the navel and the knee. For women, it is the entire body, except the face and hands.

As we have said, the purity of what covers the body is essential for the prayer to be acceptable. In one of the first revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, God says:

> And thy Lord do thou magnify! And thy garments keep free from stain! And all abomination shun!
>
> (Qur'an 74:3–5)

The body is not the only thing that must be covered in prayer. During *Salat,* the worshipper is commanded to look only at the location where he or she will prostrate, not to the left or right. In this way, one covers one's gaze and directs oneself to the Vision of God, for the Prophet said:

> The perfection of religion (*al-Ihsan*) is to worship God as if you are seeing Him and if you do not see Him, know that He sees you.[31]

Thus, the gaze of the believer must be veiled at the time of worship from everything other than God. This derives from a spiritual understanding of the Verse of the Veil in the Holy Qur'an, in which God says:

> Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And God is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty. . . .
>
> (Qur'an 24:30–31)

The emphasis in these verses is on lowering the gaze, meaning to guard the eyes from looking at what is forbidden or impure. In the outer sense, this means to refrain from looking with lustful desire at other than one's spouse, for the Prophet said, "The two eyes are two adulterers."[32]

In this regard, a renowned contemporary Sufi saint, and my teacher and guide on the spiritual path, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, relates the story of a judge (*qadi*), called by a woman to annul her husband's marriage to a second wife. The judge asked the plaintiff, whose face was hidden by a face veil (*burqa*), "Why are you asking me to prevent something permitted in Islamic Divine Law?" The first wife replied, "Your honor, were I to remove my face-veil you would wonder how someone married to so stunning a beauty could seek another woman's companionship!" Upon hearing this the judge swooned. When he came to, his associates asked him

what had happened. He replied, "On hearing this woman's reply, I had an epiphany. How is it that our hearts turn to all manner of worldly interests, when God Himself is asking us to be with Him alone?"

The next verse says:

> they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty. . . .
>
> (Qur'an 24:31)

calling on women to veil their beauty from other than the men in their immediate family, to protect them from men who are all too easily overpowered by desire, and to protect men from their own weaknesses.

Esoteric commentators state that "women" here symbolizes attachments to the worldly life. The spiritual meaning of this prohibition then is that, when coming before the Lord of Creation, the seeker must veil himself or herself from all distractions of the worldly life and focus on the One to Whom prayer is directed.

At an even higher level of spiritual understanding, the word "women" refers to the Divine Attributes of Beauty. Thus, the worshipper is advised to call to mind the Divine Attributes of Majesty, and not become lost in the Attributes of Beauty, which may lead the seeker to lose his or her balance in approaching the Divine Presence.

In the Holy Qur'an, God also said:

> O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer (*masjid*).
>
> (Qur'an 7:31)

Here, believers are called upon by God to wear their best and most attractive garments when going to pray. The call to manifest "beautiful apparel" at the "place of prayer" can be interpreted as well to be an instruction to adorn the mosques and beautify them, keeping in mind that:

> The places of worship (*masajid*) are for God (alone).
>
> (Qur'an 72:18)

The three major holy mosques of Islam—al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, and al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem—are all highly ornamented with gilding, decorative calligraphy, mosaic tiles, inlaid wood, brilliant lamps, and other decorations. All

other mosques are connected to these for, as we have said, when worshippers stand to pray in any mosque, they must face the Ka'ba, God's Holy House.

> God said, "Neither My heavens contain Me nor My earth. But the heart of My Believing Servant contains Me."[33]

The heart, too, then is a mosque, and for this reason it also must be decorated. The ornamentation of the heart involves removing everything that distracts one from the worship of God and replacing these impurities with love of the Divine, as we have seen earlier. Anything that brings impurity to the heart extinguishes the light that God has placed there. This is a form of tyranny, for the Arabic word for tyranny (*zulm*) also means darkness. Thus, any darkness which veils the heart from God's Holy Light is a form of oppression. This darkness cannot be removed except through repentance and seeking the intercessory prayers of the Prophet. This is why the aforementioned verses about modesty are followed closely by:

> God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! God doth guide whom He will to His Light: God doth set forth parables for men: and God doth know all things.
>
> (Qur'an 24:35)

"God is the Light" does not mean that God is light, rather The Light is His while God's Essence is unknown. The created cannot know The Creator except by means of His Beautiful Names and Attributes, His Descriptions. God's saying "He is the Light of the heavens and earth" means that whatever is found in the heavens and earth contains that light.[34] Since we are from earth, that light is within each of us, for God, being the Just, bestows on all with Divine Fairness. Shaykh Ibrahim Hakki, a renowned Ottoman scholar of the Qur'an, said:

> Without a doubt the complete potential for perfection is found within every human being, because God the Most High has placed His own Divine Secrets within the essence of man, in order to manifest from the Unseen His Beautiful Names and Attributes.[35]

Therefore, as the Prophet said, "Human beings are born of a natural disposition,"[36] meaning each human being carries that light of primordial faith and predisposition to submission before God.

Therefore in the Prophet Muhammad, being the epitome of humankind and its highest standard bearer, is found the perfect manifestation of the human embodiment of Divine Grace and the corporeal manifestation of Divine Attributes. It is due to the Prophet's utter submission, in the state of perfect servanthood, that made him the perfect receptacle for Divine Appearances. That is, the Muhammadan Reality (*al-haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya*) reflects the heart of the Divine Essence, since the Prophet's heart moves without restriction in the orbit of the 99 Divine Names and Attributes. He has been blessed by being adorned with the 99 Names inside of which is a glowing pearl which has yet to appear. Thus, many commentators assert that the "Light of the heavens and earth" referred to in the above verse is the Light of Muhammad, whom God created from His own Divine Light, and it is this light which shines in the hearts of believers, for the Light of the Prophet is the source of the light of all believers.

APPEARANCE

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer....
>
> Say (O Muhammad): "Who has forbidden the adoration with clothes given by God, which He has produced for His devotees?"
>
> (Qur'an 7:31–32)

Nafi' related:

> 'Umar entered upon me one day as I was praying in a single garment and he said, "Don't you have two garments in your possession?" I said, "Yes." He said, "In your opinion, if I sent you to one of the people of Medina on an errand, would you go in a single garment?" I said, "No." He said, "Then is God worthier of our self-beautification or people?"

An adjunct to proper covering is proper physical appearance. The most direct method for establishing one's identity as a traveler upon the path of self-purification is to adopt the correct outward appearance, abandoning the dress of the worldly life and putting on instead the apparel of the Hereafter. This is an outward indication of rejecting servitude to the material world (*'abd al-dunya*) and asserting one's true identity as a servant of the Divine (*'abd Allah*).

The dress most conducive to spirituality is the garb of the Prophet Muhammad, the traditional clothing worn by all the Prophets and

Messengers of God. For men, this includes wearing the turban, the cloak (*jubba*), and a ring, and using perfume and a tooth-stick (*miswak*). For women, it involves wearing loose clothing, covering the hair, arms, and legs, with white clothing being the most preferable. Such is the honored dress of the ascetics and lovers of God and His Prophet, those who reject the illusion of the material world and will settle for nothing less than the perfection and truth of reality.

Fundaments of Prayer

The first and foremost fundamental part of the ritual prayer is intention (*niyya*).

As in all Islamic worship, the worshipper intends the prayer as a fulfillment of God's order done purely for God's sake. The Prophet Muhammad established this as a paramount rule of worship when he said, ''Verily all deeds are based on their intention.''[37]

The prayer is initiated by the consecratory magnification of God (*takbir*), followed by multiple cycles, each of which follows the same series of postures and recitations: first standing, then bowing, brief standing, prostrating, a brief sitting, a second prostration, and in the even cycles, sitting after the second prostration. Each of these positions also involves specific recitations. While standing, the first chapter (*Surat al-Fatiha*) and other portions of the Holy Qur'an are recited, either silently or aloud, depending upon the time of prayer. In bowing, the brief standing, prostration, and the brief sitting, God is glorified and praised in short formulas. While sitting, the testimony of faith (*tashahhud*) is recited, along with greetings to and prayers for the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet Abraham, and their families. In addition, there are a variety of supplemental invocations and recitations that are traditionally part of the practice of most worshippers. The basic essentials of ritual prayer number about 15, depending on the school of jurisprudence followed.[38]

Each obligatory prayer has a prescribed number of cycles to be observed (see the following table).

Prayer	Number of cycles
Maghrib (sunset)	3
Isha' (night)	4
Fajr (dawn)	2
Zuhr (noon)	4
Asr (afternoon)	4

The Positions of Prayer

The movements of the prayer identify the one praying with all other forms of creation, for the prayer's postures are designed to remind the worshipper of mortality and the traversal through the different stages of life. They also resemble the rising and setting of the celestial bodies, as well as the rotation of the planets upon their axes and the orbits of the moons, planets, and suns. These are signs which demonstrate the hierarchical nature of creation and its submission to Divine regulation at every level, for as the Holy Qur'an states:

> Among His Signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Adore not the sun and the moon, but adore God, Who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve.
>
> (Qur'an 41:37)

God further draws our attention to their submissive nature, saying:

> Hast thou not seen that before God prostrate whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of mankind...?
>
> (Qur'an 22:18)

The postures of prayer, then, are symbolic of humanity's relationship to the Divine, moving as they do from standing in assertion of existence and strength, to the bowing of humility and servitude, to prostration in the face of God's overwhelming Magnificence and Power and the corresponding realization of one's utter nonexistence. From this station of utter abasement, the worshipper returns to the intermediate position, between annihilation and independence, to sit between the hands of the Prophet Muhammad, greeting the one who is the intermediary between the Divinity and His creation. The Prophet stands at the station of Perfect Servanthood and is the ultimate exemplar of the condition of servanthood to God. Unlike all other creations, the Prophet Muhammad was divested of all selfhood, dissolved in the Presence of God.

> Whithersoever ye turn, there is the presence of God. For God is all-Pervading, all-Knowing.
>
> (Qur'an 2:115)

THE PEAK OF PRAYER IS PROSTRATION

The Prophet said, "Nothing brings the servant of God nearer to the Divine Presence than through his secret prostration (*al-khafi*)." The Prophet

also said, "Any believer who prostrates himself, will be raised one degree by God." As for what that degree consists of, know that it is not something small, for each heaven might consist of one degree.

For these reasons, many among the pious observe extra voluntary prostrations to God after completing their obligatory prayers. Whenever they encounter a difficulty, whether spiritual or worldly, they seek refuge in their Lord through prostration to Him.

One must cut down self-pride and make the inner self prostrate, for one who truly submits to his or her Lord can no longer submit to his or her self. Once that state is reached, prayer is purely for God. That is why the Prophet said, "What I fear most for my Community is hidden polytheism."[39] He feared for his community not the outward polytheism of idol worship, for he was informed by God that his community was protected from that forever,[40] but the secret polytheism, which is to do something for the sake of showing off.

A man came and asked the Prophet, "O Prophet of God, pray for me to be under your intercession on Judgment Day and grant me to be in your company in Paradise." The Prophet replied, "I will do so, but assist me in that." The man asked, "How so?" The Prophet said, "By frequent prostration [before God]."

The Prophet related that, on the Day of Judgment, as the believers emerge from their graves, angels will come to them to brush the dust from their foreheads. However, despite the best efforts of the angels, some of that dust will remain. Both the resurrected believers and their angelic helpers will be surprised that this dust cannot be removed. Then a voice will call out, "Leave that dust and do not try to remove it, for that is the dust of their prayer-niches, thus will it be known in Paradise that they are My [devout] servants."

This Prophetic Tradition indicates the spiritual value of the prostration of the believers, making as it does even the dust touched by their foreheads hallowed. The power of prayer has a similar effect on the place of prayer itself, as exemplified in the story of the Virgin Mary, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

> Whenever Zachariah went into the prayer-niche where she was, he found that she had food. He said: O Mary! Whence cometh unto thee this (food)? She answered: It is from God. God giveth without stint to whom He will.
>
> (Qur'an 3:37)

It was there, in the Virgin Mary's hallowed sanctuary, where she used to find her daily provision in the form of fruits out of season, that the Prophet Zachariah went to prostrate himself before God and beseech Him for a child, and it was there that God granted his request.

The places where a Muslim prostrates will bear witness to his or her devotion on the Day of Judgment. It is for this reason that one often sees Muslims changing the location of their prayers, praying the obligatory cycles in one spot and then moving to another area to observe the voluntary cycles (*sunan*).

Ibn ‘Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet and the greatest early exegete of the Qur’an, said, “When God commanded Adam to descend to Earth, as soon as he arrived, he went into prostration, asking God’s forgiveness for the sin he had made. God sent the archangel Gabriel to him after forty years had passed, and Gabriel found Adam still in prostration.” He had not raised his head for 40 years in sincere and heartfelt repentance before God.

The Holy Qur’an tells us that, after God created Adam, He ordered the angels to prostrate before the first man.

> When We said to the angels, “prostrate yourselves to Adam,” they prostrated themselves, but not Iblis [Satan]: he refused.
>
> (Qur’an 20:116)

Imam Qurtubi, one of the great commentators on the Holy Qur’an, writes in his exegesis that one of the four Archangels, Rafael, had the entire Qur’an written on his forehead. God had given Rafael knowledge of the Holy Qur’an and wrote all of it between his eyes, and he is the angel who inscribed the destinies of all things in the Preserved Tablets before they were created.[41] Rafael’s name in Arabic, which differs from his Syriac name Israfil, is ‘Abd al-Rahman, Servant of The Merciful. This theme of mercy pervades Islamic thought, for it was through God’s Mercy that the Holy Qur’an was sent down to the Prophet, about whom The Merciful said:

> We sent thee not but as a Mercy for all creatures.
>
> (Qur’an 21:107)

When God ordered the angels to make prostration to Adam, Rafael was the first to obey, making prostration and placing his forehead, containing the entire Qur’an, on the earth, out of respect and honor for Adam, for he perceived the whole of Qur’an written on Adam’s forehead.[42] Other commentators say the angels fell prostrate before Adam for they perceived the Light of the Prophet Muhammad shining from his form. There is in reality no discrepancy here, for God said in the Holy Qur’an:

> Yasin. By the Qur’an, full of Wisdom.
>
> (Qur’an 36:1–2)

The Prophet Muhammad said that Yasin, the 36th chapter of the Holy Qur'an as well as one of his own blessed names, is the heart of the Holy Qur'an, the very Qur'an that the Prophet was carrying in his breast. Thus, the light that shone forth from Adam was the Light of the Prophet within him, who in turn was blazing with God's Holy Word.

The Inner Meanings of the Different Positions of Prayer

Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi said:

> Know that one is sometimes transported, quick as lightning, to the Holy Precincts (of the Divine Presence), and finds oneself attached, with the greatest possible adherence, to the Threshold of God. There descend on this person the Divine transfigurations (*tajalli*) which dominate his soul. He sees and feels things which the human tongue is incapable of describing. Once this state of light passes away, he returns to his previous condition, and finds himself tormented by the loss of such an ecstasy. Thereupon he tries to rejoin that which has escaped him, and adopts the condition of this lowly world which would be nearest to a state of absorption in the knowledge of the Creator. This is a posture of respect, of devotion, and of an almost direct conversation with God, which posture is accompanied by appropriate acts and words.... Worship consists essentially of three elements: (1) humility of heart (spirit) consequent on a feeling of the Presence of the Majesty and Grandeur of God, (2) recognition of this superiority (of God) and humbleness (of man) by means of appropriate words, and (3) adoption by the organs of the body of postures of necessary reverence...
>
> Still greater respect is displayed by laying down the face, which reflects in the highest degree one's ego and self-consciousness, so low that it touches the ground in front of the object of reverence.[43]

Jili says:

> The secrets and inner-meanings of prayer are uncountable so what is mentioned here is limited for the sake of brevity. Prayer is a symbol of the uniqueness of the Divine Reality (*al-Haqq*), and the [position of] standing in it is a symbol of the establishment of the uniqueness of mankind in possessing something from the Divine Names and Attributes, for as the Prophet said, "Verily God created Adam in His Image."[44]
>
> Then the standing towards the Qibla is an indication of the universal direction in the quest of the Divine Reality. The intention therein is an indication of the connection of the heart in this direction. The opening magnification of God's Greatness (*takbir*) is an indication that the Divine Proximity is larger and more expansive than what may manifest to him because nothing can limit its perspective. Even so, it is vaster still than every perspective or vision that manifests to the servant for it is without end.
>
> The recitation of the Opening Chapter, *al-Fatiha,* is an indication of the existence of His Perfection in man because man is the opening of creation,

> for God initiated creation by him when He brought from nothingness the first creation.

What Jili is referring to here is the Light of Muhammad, known also as the First Mind, the Universal Man, and the Microcosm of the Macrocosm.[45] He continues:

> Then there is bowing, which is an indication of acknowledging the nonexistence of all creation under the existence of divine emanations and power. Then standing in the prayer is an indication of the station of subsistence (*al-baqa*). Therefore, one says in his prayer, "God hears the one who praises Him,"...an indication of subsistence in that he is the Vicegerent of the Divine Reality. In this way, God relates about Himself by Himself by relating on hearing its truth through the praising of His creation. The prostration is an expression of pulverization of the traits of humanness and their extermination before the unending manifestation of the sanctifying essence. The sitting between the two prostrations is an indication of obtaining the realities of the Divine Names and Attributes. This is because the sitting is firmly positioned in a place as indicated by the verse where God says: "The Merciful was established on the Throne" (Qur'an 20:5).
>
> The second prostration is the indication of the station of servanthood and it is the returning from the Divine Reality to creation. The salutations [upon the Prophet] are an indication of the attainability of human perfection, for they are an expression of praising God, His Messenger and His righteous servants. This is the station of perfection, for the saint is not complete except by his attainment of the Divine realities, by his accord with the Messenger and accord with all of the servants of God.

The two sections of the testimony of faith are *La ilaha illa'llah,* "there is no diety except the one God," and *Muhammadun rasulullah,* "and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Scholars say that *La ilaha illa'llah* represents the Creator and *Muhammadun rasulullah* symbolizes the entirety of creation. The prayer is considered a dual communication: one is between the worshipper and God, the second is between the worshipper and God's perfect servant, the Prophet Muhammad, the archetype of all the Prophets and Messengers. Thus, one part of the prayer is a communication with the Divine, by means of God's Holy Words revealed in the Qur'an and through bowing and prostration, reciting God's glorification, magnification, and praise. The other part is the salutation on the Prophet, in which the worshipper addresses the Prophet personally and directly, as leader of the worshippers and the believers, followed by invoking the Lord's blessings on him and on his family.

These realities in fact reflect the doctrine of the Prophet's having attained the zenith of servanthood (*'ubudiyya*) to God, and thus the entirety of prayer in itself is built around his person. For the Words of God recited are the words revealed to the Prophet and the remainder of the prayer acknowledges

his leadership and spiritual primacy in both this life and the next. Thus, scholars assert that even the positions of the prayer are an indication of the Muhammadan Station, for the physical positions reflect the shapes of the letters of the Prophet's heavenly name, Ahmad, where the first letter *Alif* is represented by the standing position, *Ha* by the bowing stance, *Mim* in the prostration, and *Dal* in sitting for salutation.

Prayer in Daily Life

One may pray individually or communally, in the home, outside, at the mosque, or in virtually any clean place. However, observing the prayers at the mosque and in congregation is strongly encouraged. In addition to the regular daily prayers, there is a special Friday noon prayer, called *Jumuʿa*. It, too, is obligatory, and must be performed in a mosque, in congregation. It is accompanied by a sermon (*khutba*) and replaces the normal noon prayer.

Since ritual prayers are performed throughout the waking cycle of the day, they influence the rhythm of the entire day in many Muslim nations. Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories, and universities. Visitors to the Muslim world, where the call to prayer, the *adhan,* is made publicly from every mosque at the onset of each prayer time, are often struck by the centrality of prayer in daily life.

Traditionally, the call to prayer is the first thing a newborn baby hears after birth, as the father or a person of piety recites the prayer call in the infant's right ear and the call to start the prayer (*iqama*) in the left.

Mosques

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

> Say: My Lord hath commanded justice; and that ye set your whole selves (to Him) at every time and mosque, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere as in His sight: such as He created you in the beginning, so shall ye return.
>
> (Qur'an 7:29)

When performed in congregation, prayer provides a strong sense of community, equality, and brotherhood. All Muslims are welcome in every mosque, regardless of their race, class, or nationality. There is no minimum number of congregants required to hold communal prayers. Traditionally, mosques were the centers of their communities, where believers gathered five times daily or, at a minimum, once a week. There, the poor found food and

assistance; the homeless, shelter; the student of religion, learning. Because of the centrality of prayer in Muslim religious life, mosques are often the dominant structures in Muslim villages, towns, and cities. Traditionally, great attention was paid to making these houses of worship more than just halls for prayer. Governments, individuals, and communities invested huge sums to make their mosque the visual focus of its neighborhood. In particular, the great mosques, in which the Friday obligatory congregational prayer was held, often became magnificent examples of architecture and art.

The faithful take off their shoes before entering the house of worship out of respect for its sanctity and in keeping with the commandment to the Prophet Moses, when he entered the hallowed ground around the burning bush:

> When he came to the Fire, a voice uttered: O Moses! I am thy Lord, therefore put off thy shoes, for thou art in the sacred valley of Tuwa.
>
> (Qur'an 20:11–12)

THE SINCERE PRAYER

Ibn 'Ata Allah, a renowned Egyptian Sufi scholar of the fourteenth century CE, wrote:[46]

> The ritual prayer is the focal point of heavenly discourse, the source of purity by which the avenues of secrets expand and the gleams of lights radiate. So, if you want to know yourself, it is all by the prayer how you would weigh it. If it causes you to desist from worldly influence, then you know you are one who is given happiness. Other than that, you should be aware of what your feet have dragged along to your prayer, and then you will know that you have not obtained the secrets of prayer. Have you ever seen a lover that does not desire whom he loves?
>
> This is what you take from the prayer of discourse with God: when you say, "You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek assistance" (Qur'an 1:4)—and from the discourse with the Messenger, when you say in your prayers, "Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the Mercy of God and His Blessing." You say this in every prayer, whereupon you are cleansed of your sins, only to return to them yet again after receiving the blessings with which the Lord has favored you, which is meeting with your Lord, the highest of blessings.
>
> If one wishes to know his reality and to see his state with his Lord, let him look at his prayer. Either it will produce humility and tranquility or heedlessness and hastiness. So, if your prayer is not of the first type, then seek to throw dirt on your head out of neglect and sorrow.[47] The one who sits with a perfume maker is given the fragrance of his perfume. The prayer, therefore, is the association with God, so when you attend it and you do not obtain from it anything, it indicates a sickness that resides in you, which is either pride or the absence of proper manners. God says:

> "I shall turn away from My revelations those who magnify themselves wrongfully in the earth" (Qur'an 7:146).
>
> It is not desired that one rushes from the mosque after his prayer. Rather, he should remember God after it and seek His forgiveness from his shortcomings in doing so. For perhaps his prayer is not in a state for it to be accepted. But if you were to seek God's forgiveness, thereafter it will be accepted.[48]

Ibn 'Ata Allah's warning not leave the mosque too quickly after performing the ritual prayer also has an esoteric meaning. The mosque, in the symbolism of Sufism, signifies the heart, while prayers signify the connection between the worshipper and the Divine Presence. Thus, Ibn 'Ata Allah here calls on the faithful to maintain the connection with the Divine Source in the heart and not be too quick to push it aside to return to worldly concerns. This means one should strive to keep the connection with the Divine Presence that has been built up through remembrance and prayer, and not fall into heedlessness.

After the Messenger of God used to pray, he would seek God's forgiveness three times. This was related by Thawban, who said:

> When he finished from prayer, he would seek God's forgiveness three times and say, "O God, you are the peace and from you is peace. Blessed are you, O Owner of Greatness and Honor."

Ibn 'Ata Allah also wrote:

> The simile of one who had performed his prayer without tranquility and humility of heart or presence of contemplation is like the one who presents to the king one hundred empty boxes. Thereafter, he deserves the admonishment of the king because of his lack of intelligence and thought, which the king will utter about him whenever he is mentioned. But the one who prays with tranquility and presence of heart is like the one who presented the king with boxes of precious jewels, for surely the king will delight in that and will return the favor on him and he will always mention to others about the gifts he had received from him. This is because the one who gives has purity of heart, perfection of thought and high aspiration.[49]
>
> I say to you, O servant of God, when you enter prayer you are conversing with your Lord and speaking with the Messenger of God in the Witnessing, because you are saying, "Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and God's mercy and blessings." It is not said, "O you," or, "O so and so," in the language of the Arabs, except to someone who is present in the assembly. So, in your prayers, you should summon his greatness in your mind.[50]
>
> If you wish to know how you will traverse the Bridge on the Day of Judgment, then look at your state in proceeding to prayer in going to the mosque...for in this world, the prayer is the bridge of uprightness that is not seen by the eyes, but by the enlightened hearts and clear vision. God says: "This is my straight way, therefore follow it" (Qur'an 6:153).

So, the one for whom the path is enlightened follows thereon, but the one for whom his path is darkened does not see where he is stepping and is not able to travel the way; therefore, he will remain in his place standing and bewildered. Abu Hurayra related that the Messenger of God said: "The poor of the Muslims will enter Paradise before the rich by half a day, and each day is five hundred years."[51]

This is because they were foremost in the world in worship and constant in the Friday prayer and the congregation.

VOLUNTARY WORSHIP

In addition to the fixed, obligatory ritual prayers (*fara'id al-Salat*), Muslims consider supererogatory prayers of great importance. Great emphasis is placed on observing the prayers that the Prophet, upon whom be peace and blessings, used to observe in addition to the five prescribed prayers.

In addition to the obligatory prayers, the Prophet observed certain sets of supererogatory ritual prayers just before and after them. These confirmed *sunan* are well documented.[52] In addition to these, the Prophet would add additional prayer cycles known as *nawafil*. Each of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence classifies these cycles slightly differently, but all agree on the merit of performing these supplemental acts of devotion. Finally, the Prophet would pray additional ritual prayers independently of the obligatory ones. These include

- Prayer just after sunrise (*ishraq*)
- From 4 to 12 cycles in the forenoon (*duha*)
- Six cycles after the evening prayer (*awabin*)
- The night vigil (*tahajjud* or *qiyam al-layl*).

When asked why he used to pray so much, to the point that his feet were swollen, the Prophet replied, "Should I not be a thankful servant of God?"[53] In saying this, the Prophet expressed the essence of supererogatory worship, to show gratitude to the Lord and thus to draw nearer to the Divine Presence. The Prophet related regarding the words[54] recited in every prayer from the Opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an, "Praise is to Allah, the Lord of the universe," that God responds by saying, "My servant has praised Me."[55]

The Night Vigil

One of the most important supererogatory prayers is the Night Vigil (*Qiyam al-Layl*). The ideal time for voluntary prayer, and indeed for spiritual endeavors in general, is at night—preferably after midnight. This is the time

when the world is asleep, but the lovers and seekers of God (*al-'ibad*) are awake and traveling toward reality and their divine destinations. It is under the veil of the night that the plane of consciousness is clear from the chaos of worldly affairs, for it is a time when the mind and heart operate most effectively.

Prayer before midnight, whether supplicatory or ritual, is very slow; after midnight, it is very fast.

In one of the first revelations, God ordered His Messenger:

> Stand (to prayer) by night, but not all night, half of it or a little less. Or a little more; and recite the Qur'an in slow, measured rhythmic tones.
>
> (Qur'an 73:2–4)

And the Messenger of God said:

> Two cycles of prayer in the late hours of the night are more valuable than all the riches of this world. But for fear of overburdening my followers, I would have made these obligatory.

Salman, a renowned Companion of the Prophet, in describing the observance of the night vigil said:

> The man who considers the darkness of night and people's unmindfulness a boon, and stands up and says the prayer till the morning, he is a man for whom there is all gain and no loss...adopt those medium-type of supererogatory prayers (*nawafil*) which you may put up with perpetually.[56]

The Prophet's wife 'A'isha related:

> I used to stand with God's Messenger throughout the night. He would recite *Surat al-Baqara*, *Surat Al 'Imran* and *Surat al-Nisa* [i.e., the four longest chapters of the Qur'an].[57]

It is related that the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, would recite the entire Qur'an in one prayer during the night.[58]

A renowned contemporary Sufi saint, and my teacher and guide on the spiritual path, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, says:

> The last third of the night is the best of times to pray at night because God the Most High is looking therein at His servant. Our master 'Abd-Allah al-Daghestani, may God always elevate his stations, used to invite me to his association during the last third of the night because it is the time of heavenly manifestation. He would say that, in this time, there is no veil between God and His servant. So, each of you should awake in the third

part of the night to pray and be present in the hour of heavenly manifestations. Oh God, make us among those who stand in prayer at night, seeking the vision of Your Face.

There is no possibility to receive sainthood without the night vigil. The night vigil is ordained for the Prophet, also for the Friends of God it is considered obligatory and, as related to the community, it is a strong practice (*sunna*). Without a doubt, the servant will not receive the station of sainthood if he is not connected to God. And a token of the one who is connected with the Lord Almighty is the night vigil. This is the greatest means of sainthood, by which God adorns His servant with the secret of sainthood during the last third of the night. Therefore, be awake at this time of the night, whether engaged in your prayer or in something else, so that nothing will obstruct you from being present in this time for which you will obtain this special mercy.[59]

The renowned Egyptian Sufi Ibn ‘Ata Allah as-Sakandari said:

Two cycles of ritual prayer before God during the night is better than thousands of cycles of prayer during the day, for the Messenger of God says:

“Keep to observing the night prayer for it is the devotion of the righteous before you, it brings you closer to God, it wipes away offenses, replaces sins and wards off illness from the body.”[60]

Without a doubt you do not pray two cycles in the night except that you will find its rewards on your scales on the Day of Requital. Is a servant purchased for any reason other than to serve? Do you see a servant who is purchased merely to eat and sleep, who does not perform his duties? You are nothing more than a servant that God has brought into existence for His worship. He created you for His obedience; your purchase is for His service:

“Lo! God hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because for them is Paradise” (Qur’an 9:111).

We conclude this section with the words of Shaykh Abd Allah al-Fa’iz al-Daghestani, may God preserve his sanctity, who said about the night vigil:

Even if a servant rises in the time of heavenly manifestations and he is a non-Muslim in faith, and he does something in that hour, because of that he too would obtain the level of belief before passing from this life. He will be guided and safe because he was awake during the hours of heavenly manifestations, and he would consequently receive that special mercy. It is not possible for anyone who receives even a drop from that mercy, to remain wretched or to remain in unbelief. He is safe even if a tyrant; in time he will turn back to God, and if he is a sinner, he will repent. There is no ambiguity that this mercy will change his state.

THE PERFECTION OF PRAYER

In reality, prayer is a state of heedfulness that must be kept constantly and perpetually throughout the day. Those committed to this path seek to maintain a state of mindfulness in each breath, not forgetting their Lord for even a single moment.

The perfection of prayer means to be aware of God's Presence, "as if you see Him," and to demonstrate one's devotion and servitude to Him. God said:

> I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me.
>
> (Qur'an 51:56)

God initially commanded the Prophet Muhammad's followers to observe 50 prayers a day, but with His mercy this obligation was reduced to 5. In the Divine Balance, the 5 prayers are thus considered as 50. Calculating the time required to observe 50 prayers, it would require all of a worshipper's waking hours, including one's time to eat and make ablution. Thus, those who observe the five prayers perfectly, with complete submission to God and complete presence before God, will be in fulfillment of the above verse. For those, God will provide sustenance without their needing to work, for they are fulfilling the Divine Directive properly.

The Summit of Worship

Ritual prayer is known as the "summit of worship," for it contains the essential aspects of all five pillars of Islamic worship: the testimony of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage.

The first pillar, the testimony of faith (*al-Shahada*) is observed in each ritual prayer, when one bears witness to the Oneness of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad during the sitting phase.

Charity (*Zakat*), the third pillar consists of giving 2½% of one's wealth to the needy for the sake of God. Ritual prayer encompasses this pillar in the sense that the most important thing that one possesses is the body and spirit. In ritual prayer one give one's whole person and time to God.

The fourth pillar, fasting (*Sawm*) is accomplished immediately on entering the prayer, for one must withhold oneself from all worldly actions, including eating, drinking, relations with others, and, even more stringent than the ritual fast, one may not converse except with the Lord.

The last pillar of Islam, the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) is encompassed when the worshipper directs himself or herself to the Ka'ba, the focal point of the pilgrimage.

Prayer is Ascension to the Divine

The Prophet said:

> Ritual prayer is the ascension (*mi'raj*) of the believer.

The Prophet therefore had, according to Islam's esoteric scholars, not just one, but 24,000 ascensions during his life.

When the worshipper begins a sincere prayer, saying "God is Greatest," the ascension begins. If one is truly observant of the rights and duties of the prayers with their perfection, this will be apparent, for as soon as you enter the prayer inspiration of Divine knowledge will begin to enter your heart along with increased yearning for the Divine Presence. If these secrets are not coming to you, it signifies that your prayers are not ascending to the Divine Presence and that you are falling into Satan's traps.

Sayyid Haydar Amuli writes:

> His [the Prophet's] words, "I have been given coolness of the eye in prayer," refer to nothing else but the contemplation of the Beloved by the eye of the lover, who draws near in the stillness of the prayer.... On seeing the Beloved, the eye too becomes stilled and it ceases to look at anything other than Him in all things.[61]

Thus, the worshipper attains the state, related in the Holy Tradition:

> ...My servant shall continue to draw nearer to Me by performing the supererogatory acts of virtue until I love him; when I love him, I become his ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his hands with which he grasps, and his feet with which he walks; if he were to ask of Me, I will grant his request, if he were to seek refuge in Me, I will protect him.[62]

As to the Messenger's state during prayer, his wife 'A'isha reported:

> He would weep continuously until his lap became wet. He would be sitting and keep weeping until his auspicious beard became drenched. Then he would weep so much the ground became wet.[63]

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the first caliph after the Prophet, would stand in prayer as if he were a pillar. Commenting on this, one of the early transmitters of traditions, Mujahid, said, "this is the fearfulness (*khushu'*) in prayer."

The Prophet said, "Pray as you see me pray."[64] He did not say, "Pray as you have heard I prayed," nor "Pray as I taught my Companions." This hints at something very profound. The vision of the Prophet is something that is

true, and has been witnessed by countless Friends of God. Thus, the Prophet's saying, "Whoever saw me in a vision, in truth saw me,"[65] to the Sufi commentators carries the meaning, "Whoever saw me in a vision will see me in reality." For Sufis, the first level of witnessing (*mushahada*) is to sense the Prophet present before them. The final stage of witnessing, which is "to worship God as if you see Him,"[66] was achieved by the Prophet during the Ascension when he was brought to the station of Nearness (*qurb*), "two bow's lengths or nearer" (Qur'an 53:9) to the Divine Presence. The Sufis affirm that true prayer brings the worshipper to the state of witnessing God and His Prophet, thereby attaining true unity with the Beloved. For this reason, prayer is compared to the union of marriage, *wisal*. Indeed, they explain the two salutations of peace, made to end the prayer, as a return from extinction, to greet the world as a new person.

It is said of the Prophet's fourth successor, his cousin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, that when he prayed, he was utterly oblivious to his surroundings. Once he was injured by an enemy arrow, which penetrated his foot. It could not be removed without causing immense pain. He said, "I will pray, at which time remove it." They did as he directed. Upon completing the prayer he asked his companions, "When are you going to remove the arrow?" 'Ali ibn Abi Talib used to say, "Even if the Veil were lifted, it would not increase my certainty," referring to his state of witnessing the Divine Presence.[67]

We conclude with a story, related about the great Sufi master Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili.

> The scholars of Alexandria came to him to test him and he read what was in their hearts before they spoke and said, "O pious scholars, have you ever prayed?"
>
> They said, "Far be it from any of us to leave prayer."
>
> He then recited the verse:
>
> "Lo! man was created anxious, Fretful when evil befalleth him, And, when good befalleth him, grudging, except those who (really) prays" (Qur'an 70:19–22).
>
> "So," he asked, "do any of you pray like this?" They were silent. Then the shaykh said to them, "Then, none of you has ever prayed!"
>
> The real prayer is performed purely for the pleasure of God, conversing with Him in variations of delight, humbleness and awe which is void of hypocrisy and repute. No doubt it brings about the remembrance of God and the heart inherits awe of Him.[68]

CONCLUSION

Prayer as Divine Service

While the ritual prayer we have just examined in detail is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, in reality all of Islam is essentially a form of prayer. For the

meaning of prayer is worship, and the essence of all worship is to seek God. Seeking the Face of God is the goal of Islam, and the means are the Divinely prescribed forms of action as well as voluntary forms of bringing the worshipper closer to the Divine Presence.

God says:

> And to Him prostrate all that is in the heavens and on earth; willingly or by compulsion.
>
> (Qur'an 13:15)

> And to God prostrate all that is in the heavens and the earth.
>
> (Qur'an 16:49)

> And there is not one thing except that it glorifies with God with His praise.
>
> (Qur'an 17:44)

These verses indicate that all of creation, regardless of form or substance, are in fact in a state of prayer, for prostration and glorification are the essence of prayer. They cannot be other than that—even those who disobey, in their disobedience—are in fact submitting to the ultimate Holy Will of God and the Destiny prescribed for them.

However, the key to the Lord's Bounty is to seek Him and submit willingly with one's entire being. To become a Muslim means to say, "O God! I admit that You are the Creator and I am your slave." This is the first level of submission, slavery, but it is not servanthood. Servanthood is higher.

True servanthood of God means to become obedient. The servant has no will of his or her own but is subject to the will of the master at all times. Islam does not ask human beings to serve a cruel and whimsical master, but rather the Creator of all things, Who is the Aware, the Subtle, in His all-encompassing knowledge of both the needs and the desires of His servants.

One who attains this level of submission in Islam becomes *'abd,* servant to the Lord. In Islam this is considered the highest achievement—the state of servanthood, known as *'ubudiyya*. For that reason the Prophet said, "The names dearest to God are Abdullah (servant of God) and 'Abdur-Rahman (servant of the Most Merciful)."[69]

God says:

> Glory to (God) Who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs.
>
> (Qur'an 17:1)

God specified the Prophet Muhammad in this verse with the title "servant," *'abd,* and again, relating to Prophet Muhammad's ascension to the Divine Presence, when He says:

> So did (God) convey the inspiration to His Servant- (conveyed) what He (meant) to convey.
>
> (Qur'an 53:10)

> ...For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest!
>
> (Qur'an 53:18)

Of the station the Prophet Muhammad attained in that rapture, Imam Nawawi, one of the great scholars of Islam, says, "Most of the scholars say that the Prophet saw his Lord with the eyes of his head."

The unique greatness of God's Messenger, Muhammad, is that he saw the Lord of Creation, thus making him the perfected monotheist (*muwahhid*). The Prophet Muhammad's grasp of Divine Unity, *tawhid,* was perfected by ascension to the Divine Presence. Everyone else's understanding of Divine Unity falls short of the Messenger's. Despite this, the Prophet maintained absolute humility, never seeing himself as important, but rather as a servant, honored by the Master of masters.

It is related that when the Prophet reached the highest levels and most distinguished stations God revealed to him, "With what shall I honor you?" The Prophet said, "By relating me to You through servanthood (*'ubudiyya*)."[70]

Thus, true prayer is nothing less than Ascension to the Station of true Servanthood, which is the Station of Submission. In that station, Divine Unity becomes manifest, and there, the servant reaches the state where he hears what no ears have heard, sees what no eyes have seen, and tastes the reality of Divine Oneness. In this state of witnessing, the servant perceives only the Lord. He sees all existence through His Existence and the realization that all proceeds from the One. This is known as the Station of Annihilation, in which the servant no longer sees himself or herself, no longer sees anything, but only sees, feels and is immersed in the Presence of the Lord without any partner and with no likeness.

NOTES

1. The Hearer—*al-Sami'*, The Aware—*al-'Alim,* Responsive to those who call on Him—*al-Mujib.*
2. Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *al-Muqaddima,* the chapter of Prayer (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1994), 50.

3. See *Fiqh al-Lugha,* from al-Tha'labi. Also in Qurtubi's commentary on the Qur'an and others.

4. Cited from Qurtubi's commentary by Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *al-Muqaddima.*

5. The traditional reverential phrase used whenever the Prophet's name or titles are mentioned.

6. Bukhari, Muslim, and others.

7. Tabarani.

8. Muslim.

9. Bukhari. The specific prayer mentioned is the afternoon prayer (*Salat al-'Asr*).

10. Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Khandalvi, *Hayat al-Sahaba* (New Delhi, India: Idara Isha'at-e-Diniyat Ltd, 1992), 101.

11. Abu Bakr ibn al-Jaza'iri, *Minhaj al-Muslim,* chapter on Prayer, 1st ed. (Mecca, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 184.

12. Muslim from Jabir and others from Abu Hurayra.

13. Muslim, Tirmidhi.

14. Tabarani reported it from Anas in his *Kabir*. In another report it reads "... then his prayers are not prayers."

15. Al-Jaza'iri, *Minhaj al-Muslim,* 184–185.

16. The Prophet said:

> Verily this Qur'an is difficult and felt as a burden to anyone that hates it, but it is made easy to anyone that follows it. Verily my sayings are difficult and felt as a burden to anyone that hates them, but they are made easy to anyone that follows them. Whoever hears my saying and preserves it, putting it into practice, shall come forth together with the Qur'an on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever dismisses my sayings dismisses the Qur'an, and whoever dismisses the Qur'an has lost this world and the next.

Narrated from al-Hakam ibn 'Umayr al-Thumali by Khatib in *al-Jami' li Akhlaq al-Rawi* (1983 ed. 2:189), Qurtubi in his *Tafsir* (18:17), Abu Nu'aym, Abu al-Shaykh, and Daylami.

17. Bukhari.

18. A. Al-Masri, *The Reliance of the Traveller,* trans. N. Keller (Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Modern Printing Press, 1991), 34.

19. Ibid., 35.

20. Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

21. Ibn Rushd, *al-Muqaddima.*

22. Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurayra.

23. Muslim from Abu Hurayra.

24. On the right palm one sees the Arabic numerals 1 and 8, signifying 18, and on the left 8 and 1, signifying 81. The sum of these is 99.

25. Often cited, but not traced to a known hadith from the Prophet.

26. Without annihilation, that is, to see himself as existent before the Ultimate Divine Reality, which at the highest understanding of spirituality, is associating one's self as partner with God.

27. Muslim, Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad,* and others from Zayd ibn Arqam.

28. Jili, *al-Insan al-Kamil* (the Perfect Human), Chapter "Secrets of Religion and Worship," section "The Spiritual Symbolism of Prayer," 260–261.

29. Also translated as the "Sacred Mosque."

30. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's commentary on this verse summarizes traditional commentaries: "The Farthest Mosque," he writes, "must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah." Muslims purposely built a mosque on this hill, according to tradition on the verified site of earlier sanctuaries. It was a strong concern of the early Muslims to restore the site to its earlier function as a place of supplication venerated by all the prophets, including Abraham, David, and Solomon. Tradition relates that when the Caliph ʻUmar visited Jerusalem after its conquest, he searched for David's sanctuary or prayer niche (*mihrab Dawud*), which is mentioned in the Qur'an (38:21), the same site on which David's son Solomon later erected the Temple. Satisfied that he had located it, the Caliph ʻUmar ordered a prayer niche (*musalla*) to be established there which evolved into a mosque complex later known as the *al-Haram al-Sharif,* according to Prophetic tradition the third most venerated location in Islam.

31. Bukhari and Muslim.

32. Bukhari.

33. Ghazali mentioned this in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences.* It is similar to an Israelite tradition related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in *Kitab al-Zuhd* from Wahb bin Munabbih.

34. Kaʻb al-Ahbar makes the entire verse refer to Muhammad, it is a metaphor of the Light of Muhammad. The Messenger of Allah is the niche, the lamp is prophethood, the glass is his heart, the blessed tree is the revelation and the angels who bought it, the oils are the proofs and evidence which contain the revelation.

35. Ibrahim Hakki Erzurumi, *Marifetname* (Cairo: Bulaq [Printing House], 1835).

36. Bukhari.

37. Bukhari and Muslim.

38. The basic essentials of the ritual prayer are:

1. Standing in an upright posture (*qiyam*).
2. The opening affirmation of God's Supreme Greatness (*takbirat al-ihram*).
3. Recitation of the Opening chapter of the Qur'an (*Surat al-Fatiha*).
4. Bowing (*rukuʻ*).
5. Calm composure (*tuma'nina*) in the bowing posture.
6. Straightening up from the bowing posture.
7. Calm composure in the erect posture resumed after bowing.
8. Prostration (*sujud*).
9. Calm composure in the posture of prostration.
10. Sitting between the two acts of prostration.
11. Calm composure in the sitting posture.

12. The final testimony (*tashahhud*).
13. Adopting the sitting posture in order to pronounce the final testimony.
14. The invocation of blessing on the Prophet (*al-Salat al-Ibrahimiyya*).
15. The salutation (*taslim*).

39. Al-Hakim in *al-Mustadrak* (authentic). In a similar vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Association with God (*shirk*) is stealthier in this community than creeping ants."

40. The Prophet said, "I do not fear that you will become polytheists after me, but I fear that, because of worldly interests, you will fight each other, and thus be destroyed like the peoples of old." Bukhari and Muslim.

41. Hajjah Amina Adil, *Lore of Light* (Columbo, Sri Lanka: Arafat Publishing House, 1989), p. xiii.

42. Ibid., 9.

43. Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi, *Hujjatullah al-Baligha,* vol. 1, Secrets of Worship.

44. Muslim, Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

45. What is meant here is that Muhammad is the overall, universal opening of creation due to the fact everything was created from his light.

46. Ibn 'Ata Allah as-Sakandari, *al-Tuhfa fi al-Tasawwuf,* from the Chapter on Prayer, arranged and compiled by Dr. 'Ali Hasan al-'Aridh, The Library of the Superior Achievement, al-Fajalah Egypt, pages 94–98.

47. It is related that Ibn 'Abbas said, "If you had performed your prayers and you didn't find in your heart humility, when you read the Qur'an and you don't find a meaning in it and when you remember God by yourself and your tears don't flow, then throw dirt on your head and cry about your loss. Then ask God to provide for you another heart."

48. What Ibn 'Ata Allah means here is that after the prayer, one remembers God by magnification, praise, and glorification following the obligation prayers. It is related from Abu Hurayra in *Sahih Muslim*:

> The one who remembers God at the end of every prayer 33 times (by glorification [*tasbih*], praise [*tahmid*] and magnification [*takbir*]) and ends it with, "There is no god except God, He has no partners. To Him belongs the Kingdom and all praise and He has power over all things," his sins will be forgiven even if they were as numerous as the foam of the ocean.

49. Suyuti recorded in his *Jami'* that Abu Hurayra said: "When any of you are in prayer, he is conversing with his Lord."

50. To have the image of the Prophet in prayer is the highest summoning, even outside the prayer. Suyuti reported from Ibn 'Abbas that he had a dream in which he saw the Messenger. Thereafter he went to the house of the Prophet's wife 'A'isha, the Mother of Believers, in which he was shown a mirror. But he did not see himself, he saw the image of the Messenger. Khalid al-Baghdadi added it in his *Treatises in Obtaining Connection,* reporting from al-Hafi in Suyuti's, *Tanwir*. It is noted that this stage is reached after one has obtained constant connection with his spiritual guide (*murshid*) through meditation (*muraqaba*) which guides

him into the presence of the Messenger. Thus, meditation is an evolution after one has passed the higher stations of *dhikr;* by tongue, by heart, then by the combination of both.

51. Tirmidhi related this and it is sound.

52. These are two cycles before the dawn prayer, two or four before the noon prayer and two after, either none or two cycles before the afternoon prayer, two after the sunset prayer and two after the night prayer.

53. Bukhari and Muslim.

54. Part of the Opening chapter of the Qur'an (*Surat al-Fatiha*) whose recitation in prayer is obligatory.

55. Muslim, Malik, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, an-Nasa'i, and Ibn Maja.

56. Yusuf Khandalvi, *Hayat as-Sahaba,* 101.

57. Ibid., 105.

58. Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-Awliya wa tabaqat al-asfiya* (The Beauty of the Righteous and Ranks of the Elite), trans. M. Akili (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Pearl Press, 1988), 56.

59. Mawlana Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, *al-Irshad ash-Sharif,* private manuscript.

60. Ibn Asakir reported it from Abu al-Darda' and Ibn al-Sina from Jabir. Daylami recorded something similar from Ibn 'Umar with the notable addition, "...it extinguishes the anger of God and wards off the heat of hellfire from his family on the Day of Judgment." Ahmad recorded it in his *Musnad,* and Tabarani in his *Kabir,* from Ibn Anas, "You should pray the night prayer, even if it's only one cycle." Al-Hafi in Suyuti graded it as sound.

61. Sayyid Haydar Amuli, *Inner Secrets of the Path* (London: Element Books, 1983), 233.

62. Bukhari.

63. Yusuf Khandalvi, *Hayat as-Sahaba,* 101.

64. Bukhari.

65. Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

66. Part of the long "Gabriel Hadith" in which the Prophet describes the three levels of religion: submission, faith and perfection of character. The latter he described as "to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, know that He sees you." Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim.

67. Haydar Amuli, *Inner Secrets of the Path.*

68. Ibn 'Ata Allah as-Sakandari, *at-Tuhfa fi at-Tasawwuf,* from the chapter of Prayer, pages 94–98.

69. Abu Dawud.

70. Related by Abu Qasim Sulayman al-Ansari.

4

Vigil

Barry C. McDonald

Men dream the shadow play of history;
We live and die, together and alone.
The here below is not our final home;
All men are born to face eternity.

Why am I on the earth? And should I fear?
Sit quietly, invoke the Name of God.
Stay vigilant, although the night draws near,
Repeat again the liberating Word.

5

Dhikr, a Door That When Knocked, Opens: An Essay on the Remembrance of God

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Most Merciful

I begin with praise of the One Who has given us His Name to call Him by: Allah, Creator of every creation conceivable and inconceivable, our breaths and heartbeats, our origins and destinies, He Who has no origin other than Himself nor destiny other than Himself, in Whose formless form we have been fashioned in order to be reflections back to Him of His Grace in His creation, He Who is both Origin and Destination of our praise and gratitude, upon Whom we rely when all supports have been removed and we are left facing life and death with none but Him, and upon Whose Mercy we throw ourselves when the world is dark, relying on His endless Light alone.

And praise be to His prophets, from His first reflected light, Adam, to the last of the prophets, His beloved Seal of Prophethood, Muhammad, son of Abdullah, peace of Allah's praises be upon him eternally, he both Praiser and Praiseworthy in one, door from Eternity into time and the Next World into this world, living example of God's qualities and translator of His will and continuous blessing upon us, dispenser of the macrocosm into the microcosm, straightener of prayer rows and releaser of sorrows, the Prophet and Messenger Muhammad, from whose heart line come the saints, scholars, and teachers of purity and deepest devotion living among every people on earth and in every age on earth until the end of time, those who teach remembrance of God and who have it on their tongues and in their beings both asleep and awake, in good times and bad, and whose generosity is God's generosity, and whose wisdom in all moments is His wisdom from whose milk we may freely ladle divine knowledge and illumination suited to every circumstance in our lives perfect for this life and the hereafter.

And to my own shaykh, Sidi Muhammad ibn al-Habib ibn al-Siddiq al-Amghari al-Idrisi al-Hasani, may God be pleased with him and grant him light in the grave, whose *zawiya* in Meknès, Morocco (al-Maghrib, *The West*), contains his light that radiates out into this world of forgetfulness to awaken it to its original remembrance of God with every person's breath and heartbeat, knowingly or unknowingly. As he says in his *Diwan:*

If the breath of His *dhikr* were to fill the west and there were
A sick man in the east, that man would be cured of his affliction.

This echoes in mirror image the words of the Sultan of the Lovers, the Egyptian mystic poet Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235 CE), from *al-Khamriyya*, The Wine Ode, that being the wine of God intoxication:

Could the breaths of its bouquet spread out in the East,
One stuffed-up in the west would smell again.

And may Allah bless and expand all present shaykhs and guides, and my present *shaykha* (female spiritual master) Baji Tayyiba Khanum, in her deepest light and loving compassion, spreading the way of the *dhikr* of Allah to the West to open the passages of our hearts again to love of Allah and His Prophet Muhammad in at least some small measure of the vast dimension in which they should be loved.

Though I grew up in Oakland, California, in a nonreligious family, I was always drawn to music and words and a particular sacred aspect of the joining of the two, but perhaps not any more than any other child with a newly minted mind open to new experiences. Sacred music, Bach, Stravinsky, and generally classical and modern serious music attracted me more than the then-current pop music, but so did jazz, which in its spontaneity has always seemed to have a touch of the sacred and philosophical in it. California in the 1950s was also influenced by everything Japanese, in spite of being on the coast most vulnerable to possible attacks from Japan during the war, so that we had high-class framed Japanese prints on the wall and generous decorative elements of bamboo and *ikbana* flower motifs.

It seemed natural, then, in my twenties, already writing poetry and avidly reading spiritual texts from all the traditions, especially Zen Buddhism and the early Hindu sutras, to sit in the *zendo* of Sensei Shrunyu Suzuki in San Francisco, in the Japanese Buddhist Temple on Bush Street, and to recite the short Prajña Paramita Sutra in phonetic Japanese, that ends, *Ji ho san shi i shi hu shi son bu sa mo ko sa mo ko ho ja ho ro mi* ("Ten directions, past, present, and future, all Buddhas, the world-honored one, Bodhisattva. Great Bodhisattva, Great Prajña Paramita!"). After an hour or more of silent meditation in Zen, cross-legged, attempting (but only rarely succeeding) to let thoughts drift by without attachment, such chanting in the large, empty hall

with its polished wooden floors and simple Buddhist altar with bowl-shaped bells and gladiolas spraying out of tall vases went deeply into the heart and cleared one's consciousness of its daily cobwebs.

But we were nothing if not eclectic in those heady days of 1960s in California, and we chanted Hindu chants during Hatha Yoga practice, the Sanskrit version of the Prajña Paramita Sutra ending, *Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, swaha!* (''Gone, Gone, Gone Beyond Goneness, Gone to the Other Side, into Bodhi consciousness, *Swaha!*''), Tibetan chants of *Om mani padme Hum!* (''O Jewel in the Heart of the Lotus, *Hum!*''), and any other invocations we thought might be efficacious in transforming our consciousness, wafting on streams of the various smokes traveling through our rooms, brightening a sense of worlds beyond our senses and the mysterious workings of the cosmos shivering its lights through our walls and ceilings, in the leafy woods in our exploratory retreats, or alone in our incense-rich rooms in the dark of night.

Invocation: the repetition of phrases meant to call up spiritual reality, or halt our normal minds, to descend into our hearts to metamorphose our daily lives into awakened attention and delight. *Transformation* is the key element in all invocation, to change our central focus from individual consciousness to the greater ''cosmic'' consciousness, or, as in the case of the Sufi practices I later encountered, which have a very pure metaphysic, to be annihilated from our effective ego-self and allow God, Who Alone exists, to be experientially realized in His singular existence.

From the moment we first find we can make audible and effective sounds, we might become focused and energized in our being by repeating certain words or phrases over and over again, such as the ubiquitous *dada* and *mama,* our first real invocation to those flawed but beloved, mortal gods, to increase our sense of an intimate universe with all its vastness somehow encompassed within our hearts. And when we later discovered the existence of the no-less mortal but far less-flawed saints of the religious paths, who have repeated mantras or chanted sutras or intoned simple phrases up to and past their shattering and transforming point of enlightenment, this for us in those dropout days was enough to increase our thirst and determination to engage in the practice of what I later would be able to call: *Dhikr of Allah.*

The era of the 1960s, however, was remarkable for the amount of new material that was suddenly flushing into our culture, music from India listened to with full and devotional attention, Tibetan monastery music, the rumbling chant of monks along with their sad artifacts that were then being sold very inexpensively at various import stores in San Francisco and elsewhere, no doubt from refugees willing to part with them for any amount of money more useful to them for much-needed food and clothing. I had a theater company in Berkeley in the 1960s that based its sacred theatrics imaginatively on Tibetan rituals I was reading at the time and that seemed fitting for our crazed consciousness experiments within the overall

background environment of the Vietnam War. We had Tibetan longhorns and conch shells and gongs and bells in our orchestra to authenticate our serious intentions, and a sense of radical spirituality based on Zen but ritualized into a drama of good versus evil to try to exorcise the specter of war from our collective consciousness. We listened to newly available UNESCO records of real monks from the Himalayas, with their deep-throated chanting also capable of intoning two sounded notes at the same time, punctuated by the clanging of cymbals and bells, and the deep bellowing drone of the long horns, with drums and the high-pitched melodies of double reed trumpets. It was a real cacophony of spiritual sound, recalling something indescribably ancient in which we bathed our senses for a time. We tried to include all of this in our theatrical performances, recollecting our cosmic source through action, poetic chanting, and stylized choreography at night by torchlight to an avid audience waiting for a spiritual experience; all of us, performers and audience, attuned to the transformative possibilities for our souls and totally expectant of a positive outcome for all of the energies we poured unstintingly into the proceedings.

At the end of this period however, and after the disbanding of the troupe at the tail end of the 1960s, I met a Muslim Sufi who introduced a few of us to Islam and the stories of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his Companions, the revelation of the Qur'an, and the existence of a living, enlightened Sufi shaykh of instruction of well over a hundred years of age residing in Meknès, Morocco. I accepted the invitation to become a Muslim and simultaneously entered the Sufi Path at his hand with full confidence that this was a furthering and refining of everything I had superficially experienced so far, for it presented an immediate spiritual world of Light that I should not, in all consciousness, resist entering. By so doing, I was also accepting the invocatory formulas of Sufism (a long initiatory litany of invocations given by the shaykh, known as a *wird*), which signified a serious break with earlier practices and a total immersion in new prayers, both formal and informal, with their attendant courtesies and obligations that needed to be learned. This level of commitment and immersion was something new to me and beyond what I had experienced so far, even as an itinerant Zen practitioner. What was required was to take the new Light seriously, since it promised (and continues to promise) the total transformation of our lives to lives closer to human perfection.

To taste the community of the Sufis directly, of course, we were invited by the shaykh to a giant *moussem* (celebration) gathering in Meknès, Morocco, to meet him and his many disciples arriving on donkeys or by train or airplane from the deserts, the mountains, and even other countries to worship and acknowledge the divinity of Allah and praise with our deepest hearts His Messenger, Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, in days that were to be filled with invocation and worship almost nonstop. This took place in the shaykh's *zawiya* or center, a smallish nondescript building with a mosque

in it, near the Jama'a Zaytuna mosque that was used by the general, not necessarily Sufi population. Here would be a time of intense *dhikr* of God, singing, ritual dancing, and repetitions of God's Divine Name (His Greatest Name, *Allah,* and His 99 Names as well), throughout a protracted period of time.

In Islam, *dhikr* is an Arabic word that has a cluster of meanings. From the Hans Wehr Arabic dictionary we see that it means: *recollection, remembrance, reminiscence, commemoration, naming, mentioning, invocation of God, mention of the Lord's Name, and (in Sufism), incessant repetition of certain words or formulas in praise of God, often accompanied by music and dancing.*[1] But the *dhikr* of God encompasses so many things, all of which are a way of remembrance. When we sat with the Sufis of Meknès and elsewhere we found that they recited the Qur'an in the *Warsh* style of recitation, in unison, in an elongated and rhythmically emphasized monotone that seemed to us like a rushing ocean with no discernable shores; the Qur'an came alive as its oral recitation was always meant to be, alive on the tongues of the believers. Its words and nontuneful melodies sank deep into our blood, filled the room, recited from memory by hundreds of men (separate from the woman in this case in the *zawiya* complex), with Russian Volga depth and seriousness and a free and sweeping sonic scope particular to the Maghribi (Moroccan) Muslims, and not just the Sufis. This incredibly wide-sweeping and overwhelmingly vast musical manner of recitation is what Moroccan children have been traditionally taught in their schools from childhood, so that someone who is a *hafiz* of the Qur'an—one who knows it in its entirety by heart—was not (and hopefully today still is not) that much of a rarity in North Africa.

Here was true *dhikr Allah:* a gathering of folks for Allah's sake, reciting the words transmitted by the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an every day of their lives, in unison, thus filling the mosques to their very rafters with the divinely revealed Word of God. In the Sufi *zawiya,* after the Qur'an recitation, they would sing songs from the *Diwan* (poetry collection) of our shaykh, many of them composed by the shaykh himself—songs of illuminative instruction—as well as many from other respected shaykhs of the Sufi Path. With mint tea served in little glasses in our midst, and the shadows of the *zawiya* with its high windows to cool the outside heat, and sandalwood incense permeating the atmosphere, somehow the essence of the remembrance of God was sounded in us as if from a garden in Paradise, its reverberations deeply extending through the passageways of our lives forevermore.

When we first arrived, we were greeted at the main *zawiya* in Meknès (the shaykh was suffering from a cold at the time, so we were not able to greet him until a few days later), and then after sunset we were trooped to a small ramshackle mosque at the poorest edge of town (the Prophet Muhammad said in an established hadith tradition: "Look for me among the poor"), where a gathering of Sufis was already in full swing. This was such a heart-opening experience that I can still enter into it in my imagination 35 years

later. We entered a packed mosque over a muddy ditch, whose minaret was just a few boards hammered together as a kind of tower one could not climb up into, and found men in *jallabas* shoulder to shoulder, singing the *Diwan* and invoking Allah and His Prophet with incredible beauty and joy. The house was truly rocking! This little mosque (only when I saw it empty did I see how really small it was) seemed like the fields of heaven, and when we had sung for about an hour or two and got up to stand in the dance that is known among Moroccans as the *hadra* (the Presence) or the *raqs* (the Dance), it seemed as if the ceiling was a flashing bright blue sky of a very exalted heaven rather than the low wooden ceiling of a ramshackle mosque under the cloudy black sky of the Moroccan night. This was indeed high-octane *dhikr* of the finest kind!

This was also direct remembrance of the heart and limbs, perhaps the active result of scholars' ink but in full-bodied practice, not restrained in an atmosphere of dry scholarship. The atmosphere here was of passionately engaged participation, of all the theological reasons and back stories of Islamic recollection now made manifest and directly palpable. Here were rough mountain men in coarse woolen robes alongside elegant imams and scholars from Fez with their pressed gabardines and desert Sufis with long, narrow fingers clasping the hands of pale-skinned Americans and Europeans new to the experience. These knowledgeable veterans of the Sufi Path embraced us all with a sweetness and openness rarely encountered in our own countries of origin, a sweetness transcending languages and life experiences, a Londoner clasping the hand of a desert goat herder, a university graduate holding onto an "illiterate" imam's hand who was the living protector (*hafiz*) of the Qur'an by virtue of knowing it all by heart, word for word and perfectly pronounced (bringing into question, of course, as to which of the two was "illiterate" or which of the two was "educated").

This was a place of pure joy, of true ecstasy, of inner recognition of spiritual realities clothed always (according to the way of the Shadhiliyya Tariqa) in an outward sobriety, which meant that the "dance" was performed within strict limits, avoiding extreme expressions of joy (usually associated with Persian or Turkish Sufis, especially in the miniature paintings of their gatherings), such as the tearing of garments, swooning, or wildly entering into psychic states, all forbidden and controlled in our circles, thereby leading to deeper understandings than those gained by the drunken momentary fireworks of thrilled tasting, which usually vanishes into thin air when morning comes.

The dance itself is strong and ecstatic, the motions of the body, including bowing forward, while taking deep breaths on the words *Hayy* (The Living One), then leaning back on the Divine Name, *Allah*. This is the first phase. Then at a signal of the leader, who takes his place in the center of the circle, the second phase begins with standing in one place while still more deeply breathing the repeated single name of The Living One (*Hayy, Hayy, Hayy*), breaking slightly at the knees and stiffening straight again, as if boldly shaken

up and down by the overwhelming force of an inspired state. During this time one concentrates on the *dhikr* of the heart, letting the body loose within its physical limits, but focused on the Divine Name, even imaginatively writing it in Arabic on our hearts and writing it again and again with each breath. Then, at the very end of the *hadra,* the energy turns to a throaty whisper, until finally the words *Muhammadun Rasulullah* (Muhammad the Messenger of God) are intoned to signal the finish of the *hadra* and everyone sits down on the floor where they stood.

It is said by the Sufis that at the beginning of the *hadra,* we do the *dhikr,* but in the second part Allah Himself does it and we are spiritually taken over—we are no more, we have been annihilated in Allah. Afterward, in the calm that follows such a vibrant storm, someone recites the Qur'an in the most gorgeously melodic way, which is like cool water from a mountain spring poured over us to flow throughout our limbs and consciousness. A person of some wisdom and experience (everyone usually knows who this is in any gathering) then gives a teaching, again not a scholarly discourse, but one that seems to have come on the wind, from the heart of the speaker as well as from all those present, filled with the wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his almost palpable presence among us, and all the teachers over the centuries that have proceeded from him. After that everything is calm and peacefulness; we relax and talk among ourselves, and on this first night in that ramshackle mosque on the edge of town, tables were suddenly brought into this vast but cramped space and a wonderful meal was served, somehow, between all those tightly packed men grazing now with open hearts in the fields of heaven.

This form of standing *dhikr,* the *hadra,* is not performed by every Sufi *tariqa* (the Path or Order, the transmitted line of teaching through various shaykhs with its particular practices and obligations) in exactly the same way, and in some cases, is dispensed with or even frowned upon. The most famous "dance" of the Sufis, of course, is that of the whirling dervishes of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi of Konya, Turkey, where men in wide white skirts and tall felt hats turn to a slow and solemn but rhythmic music and singing, including musical instruments, particularly the wailing and poignant *ney* flute and dry taps of drums. Other standing *adhkar* (the plural of *dhikr*) may vary in form and intensity, such as the lines of Egyptian Sufis with whom I have stood, who bowed and repeated the divine phrases but did not follow quite the same phrases as I was used to from the Moroccan experiences. Some of the *turuq* (the plural of *tariqa*), notably the Naqshbandi, prefer silent *dhikr,* without outward performance, although I have heard recently that due to the depth of today's corruption some Naqshbandi shaykhs are instructing their disciples to intone outwardly as well. The varieties of *dhikr* may be endless; one evening we were with a shaykh from Bosnia who led us in the many different forms of standing and dancing *adhkar* from all the *turuq* in his homeland with which he was acquainted, some in spiral lines leading into

the center and then out again. And then there are Sufi groups, particularly in the West, that have seemingly eschewed the basic practices of Islam but do various "dances of peace," which are somewhat deracinated and improvised but artful, to bring people to a place of inner tranquility.

What I learned in those first few years as a Muslim and ever after in my life, coming as I did from my California experiences with various practices of remembrance, including the very ancient Hindu and Buddhist ones, was that the Prophet Muhammad, the final revealer of God's Way to mankind, brought the specific science of *dhikr* to us and taught his Companions and family and all who met him directly to remember God in every circumstance and with every breath. All of the specific formulas of *dhikr* are based on the key to entering into Islamic knowledge, *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadun Rasulullah* ("There is no god but God [Allah], and Muhammad is the Messenger of God"). This simple statement is recited on the tongues of Muslims all over the world, day and night, incessantly, because it miraculously contains all one needs to know to live a life of compassionate meaning from birth to death.

The Prophet was given the direct word of God in the Qur'an through the Messenger (there is always a Messenger behind every Messenger) Gabriel, *Jibril* in Arabic, who received the revelation from Allah and transmitted it through various experiences to Muhammad, peace be upon him. Every word of the Qur'an has a resonance that cannot be fathomed—even the most mundane-seeming practicalities—especially when discerned and explained by Gnostic teachers who have been bathed in the Qur'an in the deepest sense of the word. The Qur'an itself is a major *dhikr* of Allah, from which all other *adhkar* have been derived. Thus, the recitation of the Qur'an puts us in direct contact with God's Light, and with the very heart and tongue of the Prophet, peace be upon him, from whom we received it, word for word and unchanged, to this day. Each time we open the Qur'an and recite its Arabic with pure intention we find ourselves in sacred territory.

Scholars, of course, from the Companions of the Prophet onward, have expounded on the meanings of the Qur'an and lead us to God through every phrase. The libraries of Islam are packed with diligently and lovingly handwritten copies of books, or their valuable and precious originals, which pour over every phrase of the Qur'an to find its most elemental and useful meaning to our lives. Books have been written on the grammar of the Qur'an as well, not from a pedantic point of view, but because it is a sacred grammar, and knowledge of it brings one into an awed remembrance or invocation of the grammar's source, that being God Himself, Who has speech as one of His key attributes, as we clearly find manifest throughout the ages of mankind and within every culture on our terrestrial globe.

Books have even been written on the simple dot below the letter *ba'* that begins *Bismillah* in Arabic, which means, "In the name of Allah." Treatises on a single dot! Such a treatise is also a *dhikr,* not simply a dry scholarly

analysis, but an excitement and regeneration of the heart through profound recollection, which leads to a vision of the universe and how it has proceeded from God's command: "Be!"

So the river of the Qur'an, with all of its illuminative examples and directives, is our major source of remembrance (*dhikr*). And the practices of prayer five times or more a day and in the deepness of night are forms of very intimate remembrance (*dhikr*), as are the Five Pillars of Islam, the testament of God's Oneness (*al-Shahada*), the Prophet Muhammad's Messengership, the formal prayer, the tax on our wealth, fasting Ramadan once a year, and traveling to Mecca to perform the Hajj once in our lifetimes. All of these are incomparable forms of remembrance (*dhikr*) of our Creator and Lord, without whom the entire fabric of the world and us within it would atomize into dust-mote fragments afloat in nothingness.

I made the Hajj pilgrimage in 1972, along with the first six members of our embryonic Sufi community in London. The Hajj is called "the arduous journey." But when you are in Mecca for the Hajj, a state of *dhikr* descends upon you, and it is all a swimming exercise in the great ocean of remembrance from then on. The word *sabaha* in Arabic not only means "to swim" but also "to praise and glorify." The Muslim string of 99 beads for reciting each of God's 99 Divine Names is known as *subha* or *tasbih,* from the same root word, meaning "to swim." Surrounded by millions of Muslims from every part of the world, all there for the one focus—God, and His worship, and His Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him—with every action and every intention ostensibly for this end, you cannot help but drown in the sweet and salty seas of *dhikr*. But the most astonishing *dhikr,* the most miraculous vision of remembrance, is the Ka'ba itself, the House of Allah, the cubed building draped in black embroidered cloth, which looms up from its surrounding marble courtyard fully material and made of stones and yet fully spiritual and seemingly insubstantial: holy. A rude building with a door in it, a black stone at one corner set in a silver collar that the pilgrims kiss as they circumambulate, and another square stone at the Yemeni Corner, which has been rubbed smooth by the pilgrims' loving and perfumed hands as they pass.

The *dhikr* of the vision of the Ka'ba alone is a monumental proclamation of God's praises. Here people circle seven times, then come to stand and face the harsh wall of their reality and bathe in the Compassionate Grace of Allah that permeates the very air of the Meccan mosque. This anchor in the heart never leaves anyone who has visited Mecca, even if they stray afterward. It is the center of the world for us, and the center of our prayer to which we turn each day. Its depth seems to go straight through the earth's core and straight up to the Throne of God. No one is unmoved at the Ka'ba, it seems, and when I returned to Mecca 24 years later, at the very sight of the outer mosque from the street through the buildings as our bus got closer, I burst into tears. And again at the first sight of the Ka'ba itself through the arches of the mosque entrance, there in its courtyard, serene, waiting for the

believers to pay respect to Allah there, openly and with submission, raw heart-burst, naked before it in our being, pierced through and through by its majesty and Light, tears involuntarily come to greet its pure and seemingly undimensional monumentality.

It is said that everyone who goes on the Hajj becomes a Sufi. And if that means that one is overwhelmed with love for Allah, then it is true. We met people at the beginning of the Hajj who were transformed entirely at the end. Their faces stern and puritanical seeming at the beginning were softer and filled with happiness at the end of the Hajj. This is the result of *dhikr,* true *dhikr,* where the heart is made softer and pliant and open to God's whispers from His unseen domains. The Qur'an recitation in the prayer and the act of going down into prostration, the true position of remembrance for all of God's creatures, all of these things are the crowning glory of *dhikr* of God.

A spiritual master, a shaykh of Allah, is also a Ka'ba, a center around which believers pivot in their worship, not of him or her as a person, but of Allah's light made manifest and beamed to the disciples through the shaykh.

Our shaykh in Meknès, Morocco (May Allah protect his secret), Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, was over a hundred years old when I met him. He barely moved. His voice was indescribably sweet, but honed by the raspiness of age. His face was like the moon. His words were simple, and he wept easily with an inner rationale. But sitting even for a moment in his presence was in itself an automatic *dhikr* of Allah. I did not see an old man. The old man, the young man, the mortal man, was so refined, so essentialized, that he was almost gone. It seemed that he looked at us from the Next World, from Allah's direct Presence. You felt you were in the presence of a heart being constantly filled with direct inspirations from the Absolute. You do not see many people like him in this life. It is the only way that we have for understanding the Prophet of Allah, Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, and likewise a true understanding of all the prophets before him, who by their Messengership and their prophethood, looked at humankind from Allah's Presence, not our own earthly reality alone, with their hearts filled to the extent of the divinely lit universe. Each one of them was a *dhikr* of God. The details came later, the revelations in words, the parables, the teachings, and the commandments. God had captured them heart and soul, and sent them back to capture us with remembrance of Him as well.

Our connection to the Prophet through remembering God is that part of our own consciousness which is the human birthright, the consciousness that knows God foremost and hindmost, from first to last. Each of our souls has a portion of prophethood—in dreams, in inspirations, and in our sense of justice or duty—though (praise be to God) we have not been burdened with the Prophet's task in its incalculable measure. It is our chance for illumination. It is our cardiac highway to the center. It is simply our direct way to the living Presence of Allah.

The staunch materialists remember God through negation. The scientists who insist that no God made the universe remember him by denying Him. If the materialist says that man created God out of his own insecurities, it is simply a projection of his own consciousness, perhaps a remembrance not of a Divine Reality but of the mythically proportioned Mother and Father when as a baby he saw only their care and compassion; he too is by default in a kind of negative state of divine remembrance. But is this inspiration only mechanical? Was the need for such an invention simply psychological, the panicky reaction to a separation neurosis? The reasoning for such a conclusion is sliver thin. For where the human need to invent things ends and Divine inspiration begins is a fuzzy boundary indeed. It is where worlds overlap, where dimensions of ''our'' consciousness and ''Divine'' consciousness shade into each other, and where the intricacy of disentangling one from the other is one of confusion, and ultimately of belief. Either you believe one explanation or you believe the other. And belief is very difficult to analyze, unless the fierceness of your position puts you so firmly in one camp or the other that you will not be budged by any persuasions. This is where the history of revelation takes place, on this playing (or more often battle) field, between the ''refuseniks'' and the believers. And why one person is of one or the other ''camp'' is itself a mystery. Nature and nurture are both confounded by this dilemma. Why someone with all the material gifts that life can provide is a refusenik and totally enshrouded in disbelief, while someone with absolutely nothing is a believer seeing the riches of God's illumination in every breath, is a mystery that no amount of psychological analysis can possibly explain. For every conclusion will only appeal to those of one persuasion or another.

Ultimately, the litmus test is in which of the two, the refusenik or the believer, is the more content. Which of the two is still filled with light and praise no matter what devastations have taken place in his or her life? Which of the two ultimately is happier in his or her universe? Which universe is an endless bounty of riches: the universe of the one who remembers God or the universe of the one who does not? The person who sees God's actions in everything that befalls him or her, or the person who does not? The person who throws all faith over when a tribulation comes to her, or the person who is increased in faith, even when home and family and livelihood are swept out to sea, as in the recent Tsunami in the Indian Ocean that wrecked the shoreline communities yet left many praying more than before and, although in trauma, affirming God's Mercy? One might say that such people were mad. But whom else but God can they turn to? If their fishing boat has been transported to the roof of their house, whose power put it there? In the midst of a terrible flu this winter when I felt like dying, I had a little insight into this state. In the midst of terrible suffering (far beyond what I was experiencing) one calls out to God. Even atheists have been known to do this. The Qur'an and the Bible both say that when people are at sea and a storm comes up

that threatens their boat, they cry out to God to save them, but when they reach shore and safety they forget all about Him, and go on living their oblivious ways.

But God in the Qur'an says, "When you forget, remember." Perhaps it is that simple. It is only a matter of remembering God, but those who remember Him best are those who are purified by their remembrance, who seek Him by their actions and thoughts, who turn away from forgetfulness, and who polish the clapper of their remembrance in the bell of their hearts to make a purer sound.

Because God remembers everyone of His creation, no one is left out. Not a soul on this earth is absent from His consciousness of us. Otherwise, we would not have been born into whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Each of us who takes a breath remembers Allah. *Al-Hayy,* the Living One, breath, the sound of breathing, that thing we do last before we die, that thing that starts us once we are out of the womb, breath, upon which our words sail like boats into profanity or divinity. And how much better to speak well-shot words whose target is God than to spend our lives in the styes of pigs. Perhaps it is this simple. How much more harmonious somehow to have the Name of God on our tongues and in the moisture of our mouths than profanities and rages. And how soothingly the naming in this way cools our rages, although some use the Name of God to kill and destroy, betraying His Reality in deepest insincerity while telling themselves that they are His righteous servants.

The difference between a true person of *dhikr* and a fake one is evident, sooner or later. No wanton destruction in His Name enters history as a boon. But somehow a person of true *dhikr* of Allah who may even sit still in the shade of an arch or in the deepest recesses of *khalwa* (retreat) outlasts every historic tragedy that may befall mankind at the hands of natural disasters (God's Majesty) or at the hands of humankind itself. In Kastamonu, Turkey, in the mosque *tekke* and tomb of Shaykh Saban-i-Veli, there are little wooden closet rooms in which his disciples retreated to practice a protracted regimen of *dhikr* of Allah. The little dark rooms are empty. The practitioners are in the graveyard outside. A bit of inquiry would probably reveal more about them, their names, or some of their spiritual legacy. But even so, in the stillness of the mosque, facing these little rooms of *dhikr,* one is struck by the sheer power of their simplicity and their function. Not battlefields, which now are empty glades, hillsides, valleys, with no trace of bloodshed, only the memories of war historians, but these little dark prisons for the willing liberation of souls and hearts. A peace falls over the entire place, as if in the hush one might experience the men and women who might be behind the little doors entering the world of reality by means of their *dhikr.* And in any case, while we are alive, before we enter the already purchased grave (by the sheer destiny of our deaths), how better to pass our days than to practice the remembrance of

our Creator? And when called upon to act in the world, how better to grease the castors of our actions than with His divine *dhikr*?

We are all the same, with bodies and internal organs, men and women, our consciousnesses and mental processes, not that different really from one to another, although one might be a genius and solve the Unified Theory and another might die in jail a convicted felon. But the act of remembrance of God, in whatever Path, through whatever means, even the Buddhists turning their prayer wheels, I believe, on high Himalayan peaks, these folk are in another world, parallel to this one, moving in and out of it or staying permanently within it, according to their spiritual stature.

Everyone who breathes in this atmosphere is of another order of human being, and an assurance, as long as there is one of them among us, that the world will not be wasted and its people ruined entirely. There is a *hadith* of this, of an angel about to destroy a town, but finding one person devoted to God; so God says to the angel to hold his hand from destroying it.

We need to be these people, these pivots.

One day, I came from the modern city on the opposite hill in Meknès, Morocco, after tending to some bank business—since all the banks are in the modern city across from the old walled city, in which the *zawiya* of my shaykh was situated—and was heading back to the *zawiya* to do the noon prayer and join in the *dhikr* the disciples do after the prayer, usually including a short *hadra*. As I approached the hill that crests just before you can look down into the little valley and see the alleyway in the distance that leads to the great wooden doors of the *zawiya*, I noticed a group of men sitting in a circle under a tree playing cards. They were concentrating very hard on their cards, grunting as card players do, slapping cards down in front of them, and just over their heads, in the distance, I could see the alleyway that would lead to a similar circle, but of men remembering their Lord with deep conviction and concentration, their hearts filled with devotion. This world and the next world were so vividly manifest! No judgment was implied—these card players could be saints, and the disciples in the *zawiya* rogues at heart, but the image has remained with me to this day of the different intentions and actions available in this world within the Clement Gaze of God.

Dhikr is a door that when knocked, opens. And when it becomes second nature and as much a part of our physical beings as breathing is, then it is a door that knocks *us* open. Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* (may He be glorified and exalted) says that when we do *dhikr* of Him, he does *dhikr* of us.

What a mystery, but *not* a mystery! Why have we been created in a manifest universe if not by Him Who created us to become vehicles to reflect Him back to Himself? He *subhana wa ta'ala* says in a *Hadith Qudsi* (non-Qur'anic divine saying), "I created the creation in order to be known." We are not one with Allah, but we are not separate from Him either. "The whole universe cannot contain Me, but the heart of the believer can contain Me," He says in another *Hadith Qudsi*. What separates us from Him is His utter

transcendence of this entire known and unknown cosmos. However, He has sent word of Himself, or else how could I be writing this, a human born of a human into a material world, but whose spirit is really from God's world and has never been detached from it? One call and the wires tremble, the phone rings, He answers the call. And it is His Voice that answers. Our *dhikr* of Him, over and over, as the illusory celluloid of motion flashes frame by frame to give us an image of movement, aging, experience, ego-identity, and change. "He is always on a major task." It is not static, but He is not changed by change nor made static by stasis. How do I know this? Men and women much wiser than I am have alluded to this in every verbal and grammatical way they know. They are also flesh and blood, and heat and energy, and they have also engaged in *dhikr* of Allah and remembered when they forgot.

Dhikr of Allah is the only reliable shore against this world's ocean too vast to feel comfort in, too deep not to be drowned in, too shoreless and ungraspable, with every material flotsam of wood a mere splinter in majestic space. *Dhikr* of Allah gives us instead the splendid shore of the Next World, God's imperishable domain, and heaven's unfathomable dimension within our human compass. For the human compass itself is seen to pass away and only the living remembrance of Allah remains.

Dhikr connects heart and head; otherwise, the heart would be just a mechanical clock, ticking away, sooner or later to run down and leave us bereft. *Dhikr* puts a door in the heart that opens both ways, a crystal cabinet in which we can see Allah's Mercy, a small human-sized dimension in which a vast and greater-than-human dimension fits with ease—the cosmos in a ventricle, in a heartbeat, in the repetition of the Divine Names to tell, within us with our physical star-stuff, the beads of the farthest constellations.

Dhikr is wealth beyond materiality. It connects us to the ineffable, though in itself it is articulated, whether silently or aloud. Where before there was nothing, now there is something—a word, a Name for God, a phrase—and it unfreezes us, like the tiny forest frog that freezes entirely to the point of seeming dead in the fall to endure the winter, but begins spontaneously and miraculously thawing *from its heart outward* when spring arrives.

Dhikr is a rope to the shore of the next world, as much as it is a rope to this world that will not break. Paradoxically, it is also the happy drowning of itself in God's ocean.

God gave us *dhikr* of Himself. It is His gift, direct. It is even He Himself. Not "His only begotten son," to be sacrificed on untold numbers of bloody altars to leave us confounded by a triangular mystery. The *dhikr* of God in Islam is both direct and indirect. It is incorporeal, though it gives us bodies to withstand annihilation. It is annihilation in the greater dimension of God. So it is both drowning and saving.

"Do dhikr of Allah until people say you are mad," said the Prophet, may peace be upon him. Salvador Dali said, "The only difference between me and a madman is that I'm not mad." The *majdhub,* the Sufi who is

"attracted" to God, is drawn magnetically, and it is beyond his power to resist either the Beauty or the Majesty of Allah. He is lost within that magnetic field. He is out of his own control. Left to God's devices in even simple things like taking a step to the right or to the left, or going up one street or another, he has become a human *dhikr* of Allah; thus one can indeed say he is mad. A shaykh of *ma'rifa* (highest recognition, highest direct knowledge of Allah) is needed to bring him out of the state of mad attraction, which is a danger to himself and anyone who comes within his radius, for another might become infected with his divine madness, and be thrown raw and nakedly unprepared into a state of direct gnosis. The way of Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258 CE), the founder of our *tariqa,* was to be outwardly sober and inwardly drunk—to experience the inner ecstasy, but to continue acting in the world with cool aplomb and responsibility.

Truly, without *dhikr* of Allah, we are lost. If our Creator created us, and did not set us down without His guidance, did not cut us loose and set us adrift, and did not disdain us and turn His back on us, but instead kept the lifeline that is our hearts always open, and pumps into it the blood of His direct Presence—if this is so, then when we remember Him we are plugged in, our rope is pulled taut to the shore, and by following it even takes us to the depths.

A great shaykh of our Path, Shaykh Ibn 'Ata'illah of Alexandria in Egypt (d. 1309 CE), said about *dhikr:* "*Dhikr* is a fire which does not stay or remain. So if it enters a house saying: 'Me and nothing other than me'—which is from the meaning of *la ilaha illa Allah*—and if there is firewood in the house, it burns it up and it becomes fire. If there is darkness in the house, it becomes light, its Light. If there is light in the house, it becomes Light upon Light."[2]

There is no lovelier thing on earth than the *dhikr* of Allah. Take me to the gardens of the Alhambra, the heights of Macchu Pichu, the Atlas mountains, or the valleys of Afghanistan carpeted with wildflowers, all of these pale in comparison before the remembrance of God. For the breeze that blows through those wildflowers is His breeze, the shining glitter atop the Atlas of snows and bright lights is His Light, the ruins of Macchu Pichu are the faint traces of His wisdom, and the gardens of the Alhambra with their fountains and esplanades and sound of rushing water are a fuzzy reflection of the Garden of Paradise in His domain, where the sound is of *dhikr* of Allah, where the air is of *dhikr* of Allah, where the fountains run with the remembrance of Him through unabated repetition of His Divine Names.

Take me to the most exalted being on earth, man or woman, filled with the greatest wisdom, a true saint, and he or she is simply an embodied *dhikr* of Allah, a remembrance made flesh, whose every gesture (and I have seen this up close) is a reminder and an awakening in the tranquil certainty of His glory.

From the biography and study by the late Martin Lings of Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawi of Mostaganem, Algeria, concerning his shaykh's mystical instruction and technique of invoking the Greatest Name of Allah:

> But the course which he most often followed, and which I also followed after him, was to enjoin upon the disciple the invocation of the single Name with distinct visualization of its letters until they were written in his imagination. Then he would tell him to spread them out and enlarge them until they filled all of the horizon. The *dhikr* would continue in this form until the letters became like light. Then the Shaikh would show the way out of this standpoint—it is impossible to express in words how he did so—and by means of this indication the Spirit of the disciple would quickly reach beyond the created universe provided that he had sufficient preparation and aptitude—otherwise there would be need for purification and other spiritual training. At the above-mentioned indication the disciple would find himself able to distinguish between the Absolute and the relative, and he would see the universe as a ball or a lamp suspended in a beginningless, endless void. Then it would grow dimmer in his sight as he persevered in the invocation to the accompaniment of meditation, until it seemed no longer a definite object but a mere trace. Then it would become not even a trace, until at length the disciple was submerged in the World of the Absolute and his certainty was strengthened by Its Pure Light. In all this the Shaikh would watch over him and ask him about his states and strengthen him in the *dhikr* degree by degree until he finally reached a point of being conscious of what he perceived through his own power. The Shaikh would not be satisfied until this point was reached, and he used to quote the words of God which refer to: *"One whom his Lord hath made certain, and whose certainty He hath then followed up with direct evidence."*[3]

Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "Allah Almighty says, 'I am in My slave's opinion of Me and I am with Him when He remembers Me. When he remembers Me in himself, I mention him in Myself. If he mentions Me in an assembly, I mention him in a better assembly than them.' If he comes near to Me by a hand-span, I come near to him by a cubit. If he comes near to Me by a cubit, I come near to him by a fathom. When he comes to Me walking, I come to him running." (*Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim;* the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal has at the end of it, "Qatada said, 'Allah is quicker to forgive.'")

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "Do a lot of remembrance of Allah until they say, 'He is mad.'" (*Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal)

Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of Allah said, "Allah Almighty has angels who travel the highways and by-ways seeking out the people of *dhikr*. When they find people remembering Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, they call out to one another, 'Come to what you hunger for!' Then they enfold them with their wings stretching up to the lowest heaven. Their Lord—who knows them best—asks them, 'What are My slaves saying?'

They say, 'They are glorifying You, proclaiming Your greatness, praising You and magnifying You.' He says, 'Have they seen Me?' They say, 'No, by Allah, they have not seen You.' He says, 'How would it be if they were to see Me?' They say, 'If they were to see You, they would worship You even more intensely and magnify You even more intensely and glorify You even more intensely.' He says, 'What are they asking Me for?' They say, 'They are asking You for the Garden.' He says, 'Have they seen it?' They say, 'No, by Allah, they have not seen it."' He says, 'How would it be if they were to see it?' They say, 'If they were to see it, they would yearn for it even more strongly and seek it even more assiduously and would have an even greater desire for it.' He says, 'What are they seeking refuge from?' They say, 'They are seeking refuge from the Fire.' He says, 'Have they seen it?' He says, 'How would it be if they were to see it?' They say, 'If they were to see it, they would flee from it even harder and have an even greater fear of it.' He says, 'I testify to you that I have forgiven them.' One of angels says, 'Among them is so-and-so who is not one of them. He came to get something he needed.' He says, 'They are sitting and the one sitting with them will not be wretched."' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

'Amr said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'I know some words which, if a person says them truly from his heart and dies after that, he will be unlawful to the Fire: "There is no god but Allah."'" (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*)

Umm Hani said, "The Messenger of Allah passed by me one day and I said, 'Messenger of Allah, I am old and weak, so command me something I can do sitting.' He said, 'Say "Glory be to Allah" a hundred times: it is equal to a hundred slaves of the descendants of Isma'il you set free. Say "Praise be to Allah" a hundred times: it is equal to a hundred horses saddled and bridled and ridden in the Way of Allah. Say "Allah is most great" a hundred times: it is equal to a hundred camels garlanded and facing the direction of Mecca (*al-qibla*). Say, "There is no god but Allah" a hundred times. (I think he said) this fills up what is between heaven and earth. On that day no one will have a better action presented than that which will be presented for you, unless he brings the like of what you bring."' (*Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal)

NOTES

1. *Arabic-English Dictionary, The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic,* ed. J.M. Cowan (New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1976), 310.

2. Quoted in 'Abd al-Qadir Sufi, *The Way of Muhammad* (London and San Francisco: The Diwan Press, 1975), 105.

3. Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 54–55.

6

THERE WAS NO ONE LIKE HIM

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

To say there was no one like him
  is to say
there was no one like him!

God knows best about this
  but we say
"There was no one like him."

The best way to get even a tiny glimpse of who he was
is to recall some person with extraordinary qualities
who passed by in a moment
or stayed for a season, whose
  sweet nobility awed you, or whose
spontaneous depth of knowledge,
  taken out from some
    deepsea nets whose
strings you couldn't see
      nor whose source fathom,
light after light,
load of richness,
    dredged from the deeps . . .

Or someone you loved whose every gesture was
  meaning, whose
    still center was a
camp of tents, in each tent a
  prince whose otherworldly
    beauty swept you away.

A snowbound romance
between two summers
whose heat melted it away
leaving only a positive memory and no
 sculptor's regret
not to have "caught it in stone," or to have
  kept it forever frozen.

Someone whose strength seemed to be
summoned from an ancient animal kingdom
against a violence of nature that flooded from nowhere,

or someone whose sudden sweetness surprised you
and made you want it to last your whole lifetime
 past the closing door down the hallway,
but who went on to a similar succession
  of such personal sweetnesses.

Or the Buddha, sitting crosswise to everything.

Or the linkage of radiances connecting its dots
 through the globe
in discrete places, in out-of-the-way
  locations—
a generosity that saved someone from drowning
or a word that turned a life all the way around—

this, these, one after the other,
commonly continuous, all of them and more,

forming a whole man in this world where everyone is a
 partial enigma jigsaw,

forming a clear focus in a
 dangerous fog,
a light standing up
 in a subway of shadows.

In a world gone galvinized tin,
 a sensitive liquid.

He was like no one.

The peaks of all possible humanness
folded into one.

He had time for everything and everyone.

Nothing that exists kept him from
anything else in existence.

He himself was an empty mirror, but
the frame was the cosmos
aflame in the dot

that sits below the letter *ba* in *Bismillah*
—in the Name of Allah—
and bathes everything in light.

This is no fiction.

His Companions
like lenses
on the same occasion
caught sight of him the same
and recorded identical conversation
as multiple observers,
so that a movie of him exists, walking
alone among them,
a world not gone in a burst
once gone,
but alive forever on the transmitted
heart screen of emptiness.

Gentle humility shook the earth's foundations
since true knowledge funneled in discs of exploding
light through it.

Tattered poverty sent proud kings flying
since it endures after golden thrones have turned
impossibly to dust.

Face down in the dust
the tyrant is wild-eyed.
He fears for his neck
as God's rose-thorn digs in.

But the Prophet's face down in the dust
pushed its light through the stars,
spread out in an array
that will never go away.

There was no one like him.

NOTE

This poem was first published in *Maulood*. It is reprinted here from a Zilzal Press chapbook by permission of the author.

7

A Spiritual Tour of the Prophet's City (Medina)

Daoud Stephen Casewit

It is Ramadan. I have just spent four days at the center of Islam's ritual universe. The glow of Mecca dims into the desert darkness as our car glides northwards. My next destination: the oasis sanctuary of Medina. I have accomplished the reverential visit, or *ziyara,* to the Prophet's City before, but never in such a distinguished company. Mustafa, my guide, is a leading expert on the sacred history and geography of his native Medina. Having met me in Mecca with a car and driver, he is to be my companion for the next three days.

"My brother," he says, "I am sure you know why this freeway is called Emigration Road."

Like any good teacher, Mustafa is testing me. For a Western convert, I am considered well read in the vast Arabic literature on the hallowed township.[1] However, keen to benefit from his erudition, my reply is brief. "Because the Prophet was forced to take flight from Mecca to Medina."

"Indeed," he affirms, "for thirteen years God's Messenger strove to sow the seeds of Islam in the hostile, pagan soil of Mecca. As his small group of followers grew, the persecution they faced intensified. Meanwhile, in Yathrib, as Medina was then called, the nascent faith had been embraced by an influential number of its citizens, who offered protection and refuge to the Muslims of Mecca. In the early fall of 622 CE the Prophet undertook the *hijra* ('emigration' or 'flight') to Medina, joining the *émigrés* who had preceded him.[2] In the shelter of this oasis, the vulnerable seedling of God's Final Revelation was able to take firm root, growing into a strong, unified community of believers composed of indigenous allies (*ansar*) and emigrants."

"Wasn't the emigration to Medina a religious obligation at one time?" I ask.

"Yes. In the early years, Medina was like an island of monotheistic faith and moral rectitude in a sea of polytheistic ignorance and depravity. The sacrificial

act of severing ties to kin and homeland for God and His Prophet was the ultimate touchstone of sincere belief. Thus, Medina is known as The Abode of Emigration (*Dar al-Hijra*) and The Abode of Faith (*Dar al-Iman*). However, following the conquest of Mecca in 630 CE and the submission of Arabia's tribes, the *hijra* to Medina lost its imperative nature. Indeed, given the city's inability to support endless waves of new inhabitants, emigration was actually discouraged. Henceforth, increased emphasis was placed on its profound connotations of personal effort in the Way of God and living in conformity with the practice of the Prophet Muhammad."[3]

Meditating on Mustafa's words, it occurs to me that the timeless implications of the emigration might still have a bearing on my present journey. "But isn't it true, my brother, that the Messenger of God permitted some new converts to make a vow of a limited-term emigration to Medina?"

"There are some recorded examples of this. Such provisional residence in Medina enabled new Muslims to deepen their knowledge and practice of Islam. It also allowed them to imbibe the sanctity and wisdom of the Prophet and to be inspired by the example of his luminary companions."

Summoning my courage, I suggest, "Could the *ziyara* to Medina be considered a temporary emigration?"

"I have never quite looked at it in that way," Mustafa admits. After a few moments, he remarks, "Perhaps one could think of your question in light of the famous *hadith* (saying) of the Prophet:

> Verily actions will be judged by God according to the intentions behind them, and verily a man will have a reward for what he intends. So whoever's emigration is for the sake of God and His Messenger, his emigration will be counted for the sake of God and His Messenger; and whoever's emigration was for the sake of some worldly gain or for a woman he wishes to marry, then his emigration will be counted for the sake of that for which he emigrated."[4]

Gratified by his response, I take further inspiration from a verse in the Qur'an, which speaks of believers "fleeing unto God and His Prophet" (Qur'an 4:100). For me, the past days spent in Mecca have been a means of seeking refuge in God. I pray that He will accept my sojourn in Medina as a mode of emigration to His Prophet.

A few minutes later, Mustafa speaks again, "Tonight we should complete this 420 kilometer trip in less than four hours. Not so long ago it used to take up to two weeks by caravan. For centuries, countless generations of pilgrims braved the hardships and perils of this overland trek to Medina. In our age, millions of Muslims travel to the sanctuary every year. Since the *ziyara* is not, legally speaking, an obligatory component of the Greater or Lesser Pilgrimage, what is it that continues to motivate the believers to visit the Prophet's City?"

Suspecting that his question is only rhetorical, I nevertheless respond, "Love of the Prophet."

"No doubt," he nods. "As the Messenger of God once said, 'Not one of you truly believes unless I am more beloved to him than his father and son and all of humanity.'[5] This devoted affection naturally manifests itself in an ardent desire to visit the Prophet's tomb in Medina. The word *ziyara* itself implies the visitation of a grave. However the basis of this motivation in Islamic law is controversial. Some scholars have argued that the only admissible intention for traveling to Medina is to pray in the Prophet's Mosque, after which it is highly recommended to offer salutations at his grave. Among the Prophet's reported sayings that support this reasoning is one which states that there are only three mosques which justify a long journey to worship in them: that of Mecca, his own mosque in Medina, and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem."[6]

Muslim theologians and jurists have written tomes about the contentious question of what constitutes a legitimate intention for traveling to the City of the Prophet. Ultimately, their opinions are based on divergent emphases on the transcendent and immanent aspects of God. The Muslim Testimony of Faith (*al-Shahada*) embraces both by declaring the truth of God's absolute oneness as well as the status of the Prophet Muhammad as His Messenger.

"Yet it is extraordinary," Mustafa continues, "that Medina shelters the only burial place of God's many prophets that can be unmistakably identified. The fact that the Messenger is interred in its hallowed soil is viewed by some as the most peerless of the city's distinguishing virtues.[7] A couple of traditions of the Prophet indicate that each of us is made of the specific earth in which our bodies will eventually be buried.[8] Thus, the Prophet, the Best of God's Creation, is of the same substance as the blessed dust of Medina. Some have argued that this unique distinction renders Medina superior to any other spot on earth, including Mecca. Not all scholars accept this conclusion, but none would contest that the city is unrivaled in the number of Prophetic references to the special spiritual blessing (*baraka*) it embodies, especially localizations of Paradisiacal grace."

After a few minutes, Mustafa resumes. "As with Mecca, Medina's status as a holy sanctuary carries with it a number of legal restrictions. My brother, do you know what any of these are?"

I venture a partial reply. "I believe that it is not permitted to hunt game within its precincts."

Glancing at me approvingly, Mustafa cites several other prohibitions, including bearing arms with hostile intent, damaging its trees, and transporting rocks or soil outside of its boundaries. He then falls silent and I drift off to sleep.

I am awakened an hour later as we pull into a brightly lit truck stop. It is 2:30 AM in the morning; time to take our final meal. Soon we are eating and sipping tea in a simple coffee house. Our joint repast allows me to study my

companions more closely. Mustafa's serene face shows few signs of age, but his wispy grey beard suggests he is in his sixties. His dignified comportment bespeaks an upbringing in which piety and propriety were the unquestioned norm. Our driver, Ahmed, is Pakistani. With his handsome smile and jet-black hair, he looks to be about 35. In pidgin dialectical Arabic, he tells me he has been working as a Medina-based chauffeur for 10 years. After our meal, we offer the predawn prayer with other clientele in an adjoining room where a rudimentary, hand-painted arch on the southern wall indicates the direction of Mecca.

After driving for about 45 minutes, a distinctively Saudi road-sign flashes past. Like those on the outskirts of Mecca, it bars non-Muslims from proceeding toward the sacred territory, instructing them to take the next exit to a detour road. We come to a checkpoint, where our identification papers are checked. Soon we are moving again in a roughly northeasterly direction and I eagerly scan the landscape for a glimpse of our destination. To our right a jagged mountain is etched against the eastern sky, which grows brighter by the minute. As we pass beyond the rocky curtain, the morning sun is just breaching the horizon. Spread out beneath it is the legendary, forbidden City of the Prophet, *Madinat al-Nabi.*

Halting at the side of the road, we emerge to take in the full panorama. In the heart of the sprawling patchwork of white and green, I can make out the minarets of the Prophet's Mosque. The sight fills me with inexpressible joy. I exclaim, "May God shower His blessings and benedictions upon His Envoy Muhammad!" Mustafa then draws my attention to several prominent landmarks. Gesturing to center left, he points out a solitary massif at Medina's northern flank. "That is Mount Uhud," he explains, "which lies just within the sanctuary's boundary in that direction." Then, pointing to our right, he says, "The southern limit of the sacred territory extends to the base of that other peak, which is called Jabal 'Ayr. Some Prophetic traditions depict these two mountains as antipodes. While Jabal Uhud is a blessed mountain of Paradise that loves us and is loved by us, Jabal 'Ayr is described as a cursed mountain of Hell that detests us and is detested by us."[9]

Mustafa looks at me, as if to gauge my reaction. "This may sound irrational in our age, but we must remember that the Prophet's perception embraced the spiritual dimensions of both time and space. In Medina, he gave voice to numerous supernatural observations, especially those related to divine *baraka,* which is so abundant here." He then points out the course of a dry streambed to our left. "An example of this is Wadi al-'Aqiq. When the Prophet prayed there he felt an exceptional celestial presence and referred to it as *al-Wadi al-Mubarak* (the Blessed Valley).[10] The large mosque you see nearby is where the people of Medina don the pilgrim's garb and make the vows of pilgrimage to Mecca."

Motioning toward a dark expanse east of Wadi al-'Aqiq, Mustafa observes, "That lava tract, called Harrat al-Wabra, marks the western perimeter of the

sanctuary. Harrat Waqim, a larger plain of volcanic rock, defines its limit to the east. The two lava tracts merge to the south of the oasis of Medina. Because the sharp, rough surface of this basalt terrain is almost impossible for loaded camels or mounted warhorses to traverse, it provided Medina with a natural defensive barrier on three sides. For this reason, armies or caravans coming from Mecca or the coast usually followed the sandy bottom of Wadi al-ʿAqiq northward to a point just southwest of Mount Uhud, from where they could advance southward across a saline plain towards the city. The armies of the Quraysh twice attempted to attack Medina by means of this route."[11]

"Wouldn't the city have been protected by its fortified walls?" I ask, now doing a bit of testing myself. I am aware that the common image of Medina as a walled stronghold has virtually nothing to do with the actual layout of the city in the Prophet's time.

"No," Mustafa replies. "The first city walls weren't constructed until more than two-and-a-half centuries after the Prophet's death. During his lifetime, the Prophet's mosque and the residential quarter around it constituted the nucleus of the oasis, but most of the inhabitants lived in widely dispersed farming settlements according to tribal affiliation, including several indigenous Jewish clans. Each settlement had one or more fortified communal keeps to which residents retired in times of conflict."

Mustafa then points toward the suburb of Quba, whose celebrated mosque gleams white among date palm gardens. "Because of its relative elevation, the southern area of Medina is often referred to as *al-ʿAliya* (the Heights).[12] The northern zone, including the district around the Prophet's Mosque, is called *al-Safila* (the Lowlands). The south-to-north inclination determines the flow of rare surface water and also that of underground channels, which feed the wells of the oasis. When there is a heavy rain, several rivulets drain off the surrounding lava plains, eventually merging into a major torrent bed that traverses the entire length of Medina. Called Wadi Buthan, this gulley was described by the Prophet as lying upon one of the channels of Paradise."[13]

With that final reminder of the heavenly nature of Medina, we continue driving eastward toward the city. "The Prophet and Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE), his faithful friend and disciple," Mustafa says, "descended near here after their miraculous escape from Mecca. Their arrival was the cause of great rejoicing among the Muslims. They stayed in Quba for a number of days, and the Prophet participated in the construction of its mosque."

We exit right and turn northward in the shadow of the magnificent prayer hall of the mosque of Quba. "When the Prophet departed Quba in search of a more permanent place of local residence," Mustafa continues, "each settlement he passed through beseeched him to reside with them. But the Messenger of God told them that his undirected she-camel was under God's Command. The Prophet only stopped when it was time for the noon prayer. It was Friday, and on that occasion he led the first public congregational

prayer and sermon." Mustafa points out a mosque to our right, built at the historic spot, and continues, "Then he again let his camel wander until it finally kneeled at the location where he was to build his mosque and adjoining dwellings." Looking ahead, still some distance away, I behold the green dome of the Prophet's Mosque.

The *ziyara* to Medina is governed by traditional protocol and, obviously, I must begin with the Prophet's Mosque. But first I stop at my hotel, where I perform ritual ablutions and change into clean robes. Half an hour later, Mustafa and I set out on foot across the vast, marble-decked esplanade surrounding the sanctuary. For well over a millennium, the mosque was nestled in dense residential quarters behind fortified walls, but beginning in the late 1970s, these were gradually razed. By the late 1980s bulldozers had demolished the last vestiges of the old city to allow for the mosque's unprecedented expansion and the radical reconfiguration of its environs. It saddens me to think of all the historic sites that were permanently erased, but, given the unprecedented numbers of pilgrims that now converge on Medina, the Saudi authorities probably had few options.

As a Saudi citizen, Mustafa evinces an understandable pride in the most recent expansion of the Prophet's Mosque, which he often simply refers to as *al-Haram,* the Sanctuary. The floor space of the gargantuan prayer hall is five times greater than the older structure, making it the second largest mosque in the world after Mecca. When the roof and the paved surface around it are used, up to a million Muslims can pray together here simultaneously. The nine-year project was personally inaugurated in 1984 by the late King Fahd, whose honorific title, "Custodian of the Two Holy Sanctuaries," is indicative of the immense prestige attached to the Kingdom's guardianship of Mecca and Medina.

At the southwestern entrance of Bab al-Salam, the Portal of Salutation and Peace, we place our footwear in cubbyholes at the door. Pausing, Mustafa reminds me of the Qur'anic verse urging the believers not to raise their voices above that of the Prophet (Qur'an 73:2–4). He then whispers, "According to a hadith, Prophets continue to be conscious in their graves, so let us speak only in hushed voices inside."[14] As we enter, we utter the time-honored formula, "Peace be upon you, Oh Prophet of God, and God's Mercy and Blessings! Oh God, forgive me my sins and open for me the doors of Your Mercy!"

Before us is a long passage through a section of the mosque dating back to the Ottoman reconstruction of 1860. To our left is a low brass work partition, beyond which lies the main prayer hall. To our right, facing Mecca is the lavishly ornamented southern wall. It is adorned with three superimposed calligraphic bands of Qur'anic verse. Below these runs a row of square frames, inscribed with names and titles of the Prophet, including Beloved of God, Mercy unto the Worlds, and Key of Paradise. These alternate with circular medallions, which read, "May God bless him and grant him peace." With every forward stride, my longing to greet the Prophet swells more

intensely in my breast. Suddenly, Mustafa takes my arm and directs me through an opening in the low barrier on our left. "Let us now perform the two cycles of prayer in ritual greeting of the mosque," he instructs me. Just as the Muslim affirmation of God's unity precedes the attestation of Muhammad's function as His Messenger, our first devotional act, even here, should be worship of the One, the Transcendent Divine Being.

As we advance eastward, the color of the lush carpets beneath our bare feet changes from red to white, signaling that we are now within the sanctum of the *Rawda* (Garden). According to numerous traditions, this area of the mosque, extending from the Prophet's house, where he died and was interred, to his *minbar* (pulpit), is one of the gardens of Paradise.[15] A few paces ahead of us is an ornate, free-standing marble prayer niche, erected at the spot where the Prophet would lead his followers in worship. Before we worship, Mustafa reminds me of the tradition stating that a prayer in this mosque is superior to a thousand prayers observed elsewhere, with the exception of the Great Mosque at Mecca.[16] At that point we offer individual prayers. In the final kneeling position, the air around me seems to pulsate with an inexplicably benevolent presence, as if gently stirred by the beating of angels' wings. I conclude my devotions with the customary salutations of peace. "*As-Salamu ʿalaykum,*" I utter, turning to my right and then again to my left, where my gaze falls upon the Noble Burial Chamber of God's Most Honored Envoy.

It is there that Mustafa now escorts me. We move forward through the *Rawda* and, passing beyond the partition, turn left into a crowded vestibule between the tomb enclosure and the southern wall. A Qur'anic verse on a nearby ornamental plaque commands: "Verily God and His Angels shower blessings upon the Prophet. Oh you who believe, call down blessings upon him and greet him with salutations of peace (Qur'an 73:56)." At this point, Mustafa performs the most important service of a *ziyara* guide by leading me in the recitation of the time-honored salutations and prayers that are made at the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad. It is an inspirational moment of pure verticality, for we are literally joining God and His angels in blessing the Prophet:

> Peace be unto you, oh magnanimous noble leader and prodigious Messenger, gentle and compassionate. May the Mercy of God and His Blessings be upon you! Peace be unto you, oh Prophet of God! Peace be unto you, oh purest of God's Creation! Peace be unto you, oh beloved of God! I testify that there is no god but Allah, alone and without associate, and that you are His devoted servant and His Envoy. I testify that you have delivered the Message and completed your mission, and that you have given good counsel to the community of believers and striven in the path of God. May God then shower you with permanent blessings until the Day of Judgment. Our Lord, grant us the Good in this lower world and the Good in the Hereafter and preserve us from the punishment of Hellfire. Oh God, grant him every favor and the supreme merit,

> and grant him the loftiest status and resurrect him to the praiseworthy station, which You have promised him. Verily You are not one to break Your promise.[17]

Despite the throngs of people surrounding the Prophet's tomb, the feeling that one gets in the vicinity of God's Messenger is one of extreme intimacy and affection. In this spot, one stands in front of the Prophet, who lies on his right side facing Mecca. The Messenger reportedly said that when someone greets him in his grave, God returns his spirit to him so that he may hear and personally return the greeting.[18] The ardor of the subdued voices all around reminds me of a well-known hadith, which relates how a Bedouin once entered the mosque and asked the Messenger of God when the Final Hour would come. The Prophet responded, "Woe unto you! What have you done to prepare yourself for it?" Admitting that he had not accomplished much, the man stressed his love for God and His Messenger. At this the Prophet reassured him, saying "Verily you will be included [in heaven] among those you have loved." At this, the other Muslims present asked if the Prophet's promise also applied to them. When the Prophet replied affirmatively, their happiness was boundless.[19]

Besides a feeling of intimacy and affection, the atmosphere around the Prophet's tomb is also charged with profound deference and humility. In the presence of the Prophet, who will be the principal intercessor for his followers on Judgment Day, I am painfully aware of my own failings and unworthiness. During the Messenger's lifetime, the Qur'an urged believers to come to him after having committed transgressions in order that he might entreat God's forgiveness for them (Qur'an 94:63). Thus, for me and for many other visitors, this blessed encounter with the Messenger of God is also an opportunity to address fervent pleas to the Prophet to mediate on our behalf with God. In the view of the Wahhabi scholars of Saudi Arabia, this traditional practice is viewed as unacceptable and even bordering on idolatry. Stern guards are posted here to make sure that we do not raise our hands in supplication toward the tomb, or attempt to touch or kiss the enclosure around it.

Mustafa then ushers me a couple of steps further eastward, where we recite greetings and benedictions at the tomb of the Prophet's close friend Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, whose epithet means "The True Believer." After the Messenger's death, Abu Bakr held the office of Commander of the Faithful (*Amir al-Mu'minin,* the official title of the Caliph of the Islamic state) for two years before his own death. The hallowed chamber where Abu Bakr is buried was part of the dwelling belonging to his daughter 'A'isha (d. 678 CE), the Prophet's favorite wife. Two or three paces further, we pay our respects at the tomb of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE), the second of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, whose strength of character and integrity were legendary. His 10-year rule was cut short by an assassin's knife while leading the prayer only a few meters away in this mosque.

Having performed the most essential rites of *ziyara,* I am led around the enclosure of the tomb chamber back toward the main prayer hall. As we walk, Mustafa whispers, ''Both the original mosque and the adjoining houses of the Prophet's wives were built of the most rustic materials. The walls were of unfired mud brick. Date tree trunks served as columns and were split for beams to support a roof made of layered palm branches and covered with earth. Over its long history, the mosque has been enlarged and renovated many times by successive rulers. Twice it was destroyed by fire, and it had to be entirely rebuilt. But with each reconstruction, the position of the original columns, along with the location of the Prophet's places of prayer and pulpit, were carefully preserved. And with each expansion the names and relative locations of historic doorways were also maintained.''

Within the precincts of the *Rawda,* Mustafa points out several historic columns clad in white marble. Among them is The Pillar of Delegations, at whose base the Prophet sat when receiving representatives of Arabian tribes who came to swear their allegiance to him following the conquest of Mecca. Another is The Casting of Lots Pillar, before which the Prophet showed a marked preference for offering voluntary, individual prayers. Concerning the name of this column, the Prophet once said that if people realized the special grace that is to be found in worshipping at that spot, they would cast lots for the privilege.[20] In this most prized place of devotion, I wait my turn to offer a supererogatory prayer.

We then approach the intricately carved and gilded white marble pulpit (*minbar*). Dating from the late sixteenth century, its arched doorway gives way to a tall set of railed steps leading to dais housed in an ornamental pillared turret. The Prophet's original *minbar,* destroyed in the great fire of 1256 CE, was a kind of raised wooden armchair mounted on two steps. In many traditions, it is depicted as standing astride the Prophet's water basin (*hawd*) in Paradise, from which he will dispense to the blessed a drink that will forever banish all thirst.[21] Mustafa recounts the wondrous story of the pulpit's first use. ''For several years the Messenger of God delivered the Friday sermon standing on this spot, occasionally supporting himself on the trunk of a date palm erected there for that purpose. When his fatigue became more apparent, he agreed to have a pulpit constructed for him. When he first ascended it, the assembled congregation was astonished to hear the palm trunk begin to moan like a she camel yearning for her offspring. It continued to moan until the Messenger came down from the pulpit and embraced it.''[22]

Moving northward through the colonnaded hall, we enter a wide courtyard. Here the sun's light and heat are refracted through six enormous, but elegant, fabric umbrellas, installed during the latest expansion project. ''The original Mosque of the Prophet also had a courtyard,'' Mustafa explains. ''Besides being an extension of the prayer space, it was used for other communal purposes. To its rear was a small shaded area, which served as a shelter for indigent male immigrants and occasional groups of visitors.

As a result of living here in such close proximity to the Prophet, a number of these companions became leading scholars."

The shaded court suddenly echoes with the amplified, melodious call for the midday prayer. The space around us quickly fills up with men attired in a diverse range of traditional dress. The screened-off women's section to our distant left is no doubt witness to a similar scene. When the second, final call to prayer sounds, we coalesce into long, orderly lines for worship. Afterward, as we exit, Mustafa proposes that I return to my hotel for a brief siesta. Suddenly feeling light-headed in the glaring midday sun, I happily submit to his suggestion.

Later, after the mid-afternoon prayer, I meet Mustafa at the southeast corner of the *Haram*. A brief stroll eastward across the geometrically patterned plaza brings us to the gates of Islam's most hallowed cemetery, *Baqi' al-Gharqad,* said to shelter the remains of more than 10,000 of the Prophet's venerable companions. "The Prophet" Mustafa tells me, "made a regular habit of visiting this graveyard late in the night and he would say, 'Peace be upon you, house of the believing folk. Coming upon you is that which you were promised, soon at a time decreed. And verily, God willing, we will be joining you. O God! Forgive the people of Baqi' al-Gharqad!'"[23]

Inside the cemetery, I am struck by the austerity of the vast expanse. Less than a hundred years ago, the tombs of its most illustrious personages were adorned with domed mausoleums and ornate headstones. In 1925, after conquering Medina, the forces of the Saudi King 'Abd al-'Aziz obliterated all of these funerary structures. Like their Wahhabi predecessors, who had flattened the graveyard in 1805, these puritan warriors ascribed to the reformist doctrines of the theologian Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), from whose name the term "Wahhabi" derives. While this demolition of tombs was and continues to be decried as a shameless desecration by many Muslims worldwide, the perpetrators saw it as an enforcement of a legal prohibition against the building of raised structures on Muslim tombs. From their uncompromisingly literalist perspective, they were simply doing their righteous duty in eradicating inadmissible innovations and objects of reverence that detracted from the worship of the One, utterly Transcendent God. Though I am sympathetic with the pious intentions of those who had erected the beautiful burial monuments that once stood here, I am forced to admit that the barren, bone-littered terrain now before me does serve to emphasize one of the principal reasons the Prophet encouraged Muslims to visit graveyards: the remembrance of death.

Beginning with the members of the Prophet's family, we recite salutations and prayers at each major gravesite. First, I am led to the graves of eight of the Prophet's wives, referred to collectively as "Mothers of the Believers." Then we visit the resting place of three of the Messenger's daughters, Ruqayya, Zaynab, and Umm Kulthum. Next we move to an area, once covered by a large cupola, where several of his most eminent kinfolk

are interred. These include his revered daughter Fatima (d. 632 CE). Her marriage to the Prophet's cousin 'Ali (d. 661 CE) produced al-Hasan (d. 669 CE) and al-Husayn (d. 680 CE), from whose loins issued the entire lineage of the Prophet's descendents. Al-Hasan's blessed body lies nearby. The same spot shelters a paternal uncle of the Prophet, al-'Abbas (d. 653 CE), whose progeny founded the 'Abbasid Dynasty in 750 CE. Here, too, is the revered tomb of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765 CE), a great-great-grandson of the Prophet through al-Husayn, and a central figure for both Imami and Ismaili Shiites. Further on, Mustafa guides me to the burial spot of Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 798 CE), founder of one of the four great schools of Sunni jurisprudence. At a surprising distance from the graves of his contemporaries, is the tomb of the third Rightly Guided Caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. In 656 CE, he was murdered by rebels, who prevented his interment next to the Prophet or even in the main cemetery. Instead, he was buried in a small garden, which was incorporated into the enlarged graveyard by his clansmen after they had established the Umayyad Caliphate.

Retracing our steps to the entrance, we turn and offer final general benedictions and salutations to the folk of *al-Baqi'*. "According to a hadith," Mustafa tells me, "those buried here will be the first to be resurrected after the Prophet on the Day of Judgment.[24] God's Messenger also encouraged all those who have the possibility of dying in Medina to do so, promising to intercede for them."[25]

The declining sun shines in our faces as we head back to the *Haram*. To the north, Mount Uhud glows in hues of pink and purple. The polished deck ahead of us has been transformed into a ritual picnic space. Countless rows of people are seated at long sheets of plastic laid out with provisions to break the fast of Ramadan. The benefactors at each makeshift table implore passersby to join them for the sunset supper. Mustafa exchanges familiar greetings with many of his fellow townsmen, but politely moves on. Inside the mosque, the same scene repeats itself. After much effort we reach a spot in the crowded *Rawda,* where Mustafa's brother has saved two places for us at his breakfast spread. Greeting him warmly and offering salutations to those around us, we take our seats on the carpeted floor. Hailing from diverse corners of the Islamic World, most of our table companions speak no common language. However, they are unified by the common bond of faith and by the generosity of our host, who in the spirit of the Helpers (*al-Ansar*), the people of Medina who provided shelter and support for the Prophet and his Companions, provides for us in the hope of otherworldly recompense. Together we wait patiently for the *muezzin* to signal sunset and permission to still the thirst and hunger each of us feels. It is a moment to be cherished, for beyond this holy place and this holy time, the community of the faithful is, alas, often more of an ideal than a reality.

"*Allahu akbar,* God is Most Great," sounds the call to prayer. Parched lips murmur the traditional formula of consecration, and fingers reach for dates

laid out before us. This is followed by a sip of water, which Mustafa reminds me is brought from the blessed well of Zam Zam in Mecca. A cup of unsweetened Arabian coffee is then pressed into my hand. Made from unroasted beans and flavored with cardamom, it is light green in color. Bread and more water, coffee and dates are passed around. The dignified atmosphere reflects the ritual nature of this fleeting feast. "*Allahu akbar,*" the second call rings out. Almost instantaneously, utensils and uneaten food are packed away, plastic sheeting is rolled up and lines for prayer are formed. I find myself standing between an Indonesian and a Nigerian and together we worship the Sustainer of Creation.

When the prayer is finished, Mustafa goes home to take a more substantial meal with his family, and I to dine at my hotel. An hour later, I return and find a place in an arcade at the rear of the foremost courtyard for the evening prayer. With the giant umbrellas now retracted, I have a splendid view of a classic image of the Prophet's Mosque: the Green Dome superimposed upon the main southeast minaret. The majestic cupola above the Prophet's burial chamber was rebuilt by an Ottoman Caliph in 1817. The finely contoured tower to its left was erected in the late fifteenth century at the command of a great Sultan of Mamluke Egypt.

Following the prayer service, I remain with nearly all those around me to participate in the prolonged cycles of communal, supererogatory prayer particular to Ramadan. Each night of the holy month, in mosques throughout the world, successive sections of the entire Qur'an are recited during these devotions. It is especially rewarding to take part in this observance in Medina, where the greater part of the Muslim scripture was revealed. It is said that Medina alone was "conquered by the Qur'an," while other realms were conquered by the sword. For the next hour, I immerse myself in the powerful, cleansing stream of God's words, punctuated by the self-effacing movements of prayer with my fellow Muslims.

I sleep briefly but well that night and rise at 2:30 AM to take a light meal, before heading to the Prophet's Mosque. After the predawn prayer, I rendezvous with Mustafa at one of the rear doors. Our stroll to the car takes us through a complex of hotels and shopping areas. In shops that never seem to close, merchants are doing a brisk business in pilgrim goods, including Qur'ans in a variety of sizes and styles, prayer manuals, prayer carpets and prayer beads, and Medina dates. The economies of both Mecca and Medina continue to depend heavily upon their spiritual tourists, who are expected to return home with gifts and souvenirs. Both sanctuary cities have become massive commercial clearinghouses for everything from jewelry and perfume to electronic goods and textiles.

The sky has begun to visibly brighten as we set off northwards to visit the Graves of the Martyrs at Uhud. As we drive, Mustafa provides background commentary: "In 625 CE, a Quraysh army of 3,000 warriors, keen to avenge their bitter defeat at the Battle of Badr the previous year, had advanced from

Mecca and was encamped just southwest of Mount Uhud. After consulting his companions, the Prophet decided to confront the enemy near their camp. So in the dead of night, the Muslim force of about 800 men marched out in the same direction we are moving now."

Halting before a spacious cove at the foot of Mount Uhud, we proceed on foot to the barred gate of the graveyard. Seventy Muslim heroes were killed during this battle, the most celebrated being the Prophet's uncle Hamza, who was known as "The Lion of God" for his great courage and martial skill. "The Prophet used to visit these graves regularly and pray for the martyrs," Mustafa says. He then recites a Qur'anic verse, "And do not imagine that those killed in the path of God are dead, nay they are alive and are receiving provisions with their Lord" (Qur'an 3:169). After offering salutations and benedictions for the martyrs of Uhud, we climb a low hill called The Archers' Mount just south of the graveyard. Above us looms the granite mass of Mount Uhud. Behind us runs the westward course of the dry streambed of Wadi Qana.

Looking down upon the ancient battlefield, Mustafa recounts its principal phases:[26] "The Prophet assigned this strategic spot to about fifty archers, with orders to remain here at all costs to protect the rear and southern flank of his main force from the superior Quraysh cavalry. The main Muslim army was positioned in the center, there, with their backs to the slope of Uhud and facing the enemy's infantry, who stood in formation over there to the left. Despite being outnumbered more than three to one, the holy warriors soon gained the upper hand. Pursued by the prematurely triumphant Muslim soldiers, the Meccans fled in disarray toward their encampment. Seeing this and ignoring the pleas of their commander, the majority of the archers stationed here then abandoned their posts to join in pursuit of the enemy. It was then that the tide of battle turned, as the adversary's horsemen were able to come around the south of this hillock and attack the believers from behind. In the ensuing confusion, the Prophet was injured and was even rumored to have been killed. Many Muslims were slain, while others fled to Medina. A stalwart group gathered around the Messenger and, defending him with selfless courage and tenacity, gradually retreated up that gorge to the safety of higher ground. When the enemy finally retreated, the Prophet descended from Mount Uhud to find that the bodies of the fallen Muslims had been mutilated vindictively. He then ordered graves to be dug here, and led the funeral prayer for all of them."

Spellbound by Mustafa's narrative, I linger on the hilltop meditating on the supreme importance God gives to the intentions behind our acts. In particular, I think of the illuminating tales of two men slain that day. One of them, a native of Medina, had resisted all attempts to convert him to Islam until the eve of the battle, when his heart was suddenly penetrated by faith. Taking up his arms, he had made his way alone to Uhud, where he fought until he was mortally wounded. Recognized by his fellow tribesmen,

he told them of his conversion and died in their arms. He is known as the Muslim who entered Paradise without ever having made a single prostration to God.[27] Another man who fought with tremendous bravery and ferocity was also found breathing his last. Those around him comforted him with tidings of a martyr's reward, upon which he insisted that his sole motivation had been to bring honor to his tribe. Then, when his pain became unbearable, he took an arrow from his quiver and killed himself. The Prophet later declared him one of the people in Hellfire, as taking one's own life is forbidden in the strongest terms in Islam.[28]

Mustafa has already begun to pick his way back down the hill and I follow him solemnly. A growing number of visitors now throng the gate of the hallowed cemetery. Above them a large sign in several languages sternly warns against engaging in any prohibited devotional acts. It is curious how this dogmatic zeal to uphold God's transcendence can lead to an indifference—almost an aversion—to the *baraka,* the spiritual blessing, of sacred sites. Alas, I cannot help but notice how the strict guardians of the faith in Arabia, who sanctioned the destruction of the mausoleum over Hamza's grave, have allowed much of this sanctified battlefield to become clustered with ugly cinderblock dwellings and strewn with trash.

As we begin driving back toward Medina, Mustafa points northwest toward the confluence of Medina's three main riverbeds. "There are a couple of traditions about the Last Days, which prophesy that the *Dajjal* (a sort of Islamic Anti-Christ) will establish his camp on the plain there, which lies just outside the boundary of Medina's sanctuary. While many of the city's inhabitants will join him, he will be prevented from entering the sacred territory by armed angels."[29]

After crossing the western lava tract, we soon reach the Mosque of Quba. Reconstructed in the early 1980s, its monumental walls are crenellated and each of its four corners is marked by a commanding minaret. "After the *Haram,* this is the most important mosque in Medina," Mustafa notes. "According to many traditions, those who perform their ritual ablutions and come here with the sole intention of praying will have the reward of performing the lesser pilgrimage (the *'Umra* pilgrimage) to Mecca.[30] The Prophet reportedly came here to pray on a weekly basis." We enter the eastern door of the mosque and pass through a lovely arcaded courtyard before turning left to pray beneath the lofty domes of the main prayer hall.

Mustafa then rises and exchanges friendly greetings with an elderly caretaker. After he introduces me, the three of us walk to the rear of the mosque. At the northwest corner Mustafa's compatriot unlocks a small door. "We are going to the top of the minaret," Mustafa tells me. The narrow stairwell winds around and around. An occasional window and the view from an intermediary gallery reveal our increasing altitude. Finally, we reach the topmost balcony, where we are rewarded by a breathtaking panorama of the entire oasis.

"*Al-hamdu li-Llah,*" Mustafa exclaims. "Praise be to God, you have now visited the four most universally recommended visiting-places (*mazarat*) of Medina. However, as you know, Medina comprises many other places of reverential visitation linked to the life of God's Messenger. While not all scholars encourage visiting these secondary sites, to my mind they constitute precious landmarks in the sacred history of the Prophet's city. From very early times they have been a traditional part of the complete itinerary of *ziyara*."

Looking northward toward the city center, Mustafa continues. "In the time of the Prophet, Muslims from throughout the oasis of Medina would congregate at the *Haram* for the weekly Friday prayers. However, for the regular daily prayers, inhabitants normally worshipped in smaller tribal mosques, like this one, closer to their dwellings and gardens. God's Messenger prayed in most of these communal mosques. He is also reported to have worshipped in many open-air locations in Medina, especially in the course of military campaigns. In the early eighth century CE, an Umayyad Caliph ordered that commemorative stone mosques be built at all the places where the Prophet's blessed forehead touched the ground in prostration. Historical sources mention more than fifty such shrines, of which the location and identity of only about twenty are known today. God willing, we shall be visiting some of the most important ones."

Then pointing down to the west of our dizzying perch, Mustafa tells me, "Buried beneath the street down there is the Well of Aris, from whose water the Messenger is said to have drunk and purified himself. Its more famous name is Well of the Ring, in reference to an incident in the life of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. As third caliph, he had inherited the Prophet's silver seal ring from the Caliph 'Umar, who had it from the Caliph Abu Bakr. One day, while he was sitting at the rim of this well, the treasured band slipped from his hand and fell into the well. Though the well was dug for three days in search of it, the ring was never found.[31] Until only recently it was a prominent landmark to which pilgrims flocked to drink its blessed water."

It is almost noon as we head to the Mosque of the Friday Prayer, which we had passed on the first day. After performing the ritual salutation of the mosque, we wait to observe the midday prayer in congregation. Leaning against a column, I watch as fellow Muslims of every conceivable ethnic and racial description stream in. My own blue-eyed and fair-haired presence turns not a single head. Both Mecca and Medina offer a welcome respite from the well-intentioned questions and attention I would inevitably attract in most any other Islamic country. Soon the call to prayer brings all people to their feet and we follow the Imam in worship.

I emerge weary and thirsty from the air-conditioned mosque. Outside, the October sun hammers down on the softened asphalt. Noticing the beads of sweat forming on my brow, Mustafa relates a hadith in which the Prophet promises to be a witness or an intercessor for those who patiently bear

the rigors of Medina's climate.[32] I am gratified but am glad when Mustafa proposes that I now return to my hotel to rest.

After an hour's nap, I proceed to the *Haram* alone for the mid-afternoon prayer. Throughout the older prayer hall are groups of men seated around teachers giving lessons in various branches of religious science. The Messenger of God once said that whoever enters his mosque to learn or teach good things is like the holy warrior on the path of God.[33] Since its foundation more than 14 centuries ago, the Prophet's Mosque has been a vibrant center of religious education. Nearly all of the great early scholars of Islam spent periods in Medina, a preeminent halting place for those who traveled in search of knowledge. The function of the mosque in this respect is highlighted in an exquisite anecdote describing how the famed Hadith narrator Abu Hurayra once wandered into Medina's bustling marketplace and expressed his surprise that so many people were there when the inheritance of the Prophet was being distributed in his mosque. The crowds rushed to the *Haram* but soon returned in disappointment to Abu Hurayra. He asked them what they witnessed there, they said they had only seen people teaching and learning religious knowledge and remembering God. "*That* is the inheritance of the Prophet," he reminded them.[34]

When the call to prayer sounds, the study circles dissolve into lines and we prostrate to the All-Knowing One. I then meet Mustafa at the western entrance of Bab al-Rahma, the Gate of Mercy. "The name of this door," he explains, "can be traced back to an incident during the Prophet's life. A period of drought had afflicted the region and while the Prophet was sitting on the pulpit to deliver the weekly sermon, a man came in through this entrance and implored the Prophet to pray for relief. As they watched through this door, the sky began to fill with welcome dark clouds. The rains came and lasted a week. The next Friday, the man came in and begged the Prophet to preserve them from the ceaseless downpour. The Messenger prayed that the rain fall around Medina instead of upon it and this, too, was answered."[35] I recall that rain and mercy are often linked in the Qur'an. In other verses, the image of heavenly precipitation giving life to a desiccated landscape is a common allegory for the resurrection of the dead.

We head southwest across the plaza toward a comparatively small-domed mosque rebuilt in the Ottoman era. "This is Masjid al-Musalla (Mosque of the Outdoor Feast Day Prayers)," says Mustafa. "In this area, the Messenger of God would assemble his followers for open-air services to celebrate the Feast of the Sacrifice (*'Id al-Adha*) and the holy day marking the end of Ramadan (*'Id al-Fitr*). Its more popular name of Masjid al-Ghamama (Mosque of the Cloud) is probably related to the Prophet's having performed communal rain-seeking prayers here."

Further on, we come to a handsome basalt mosque built in late Ottoman times to serve the terminal of the Hijaz Railway, which lies across the street. As we make our way to the derelict train station, Mustafa explains,

"The rail-line linking Damascus to Medina was inaugurated in 1908, but was used for only eight years. During the First World War, it became a favored target of the Arab Revolt against Turkish control. In this they had the active encouragement of Lawrence of Arabia, the British agent charged with opening a southern front against Germany's oriental ally, the Ottoman Empire. The destroyed railway to Medina was never repaired." Mustafa allows me to briefly explore the vast walled yard behind the train station. In a half-collapsed maintenance hangar, I see a couple of century-old German locomotives and the sad remains of some damaged railcars.

Mustafa then directs me toward the real objective of our visit, a tiny triple-domed mosque near the southeastern corner of the terminal enclosure. "This is al-Suqya Mosque," he states. Here the Prophet assembled and reviewed his troops in the spring of 624 CE before marching on to the victorious Battle of Badr, about a hundred and fifty kilometers to the west. On another occasion, the Prophet prayed here and made a famous supplication in which he sanctified the city of Medina:

> O God! Verily Abraham, Your intimate friend, Your devoted servant and Your Prophet, invoked your blessings upon the people of Mecca. I am Muhammad, Your devoted servant, Your Prophet and Your Messenger, and I invoke Your favor for the people of Medina, asking you for that which Abraham asked for the people of Mecca. We entreat You to bless them in the measures of their sustenance and in the fruit of their earth. O God, cause us to love Medina, just as You instilled in us love for Mecca.... O God, I have declared what lies between its two lava tracts to be an inviolable sanctuary just as You established the sanctuary of Mecca through the declaration of Abraham.[36]

Standing before the mosque's closed doors, we recite a brief prayer before returning to the Prophet's Mosque to break the fast. When we finally reach the *Rawda*, only a few minutes remain before sunset. Mustafa places a handful of small, dark, wrinkled dates in front of me. "These are *'Ajwa* dates," he whispers, "The most prized of Medina's nearly one hundred varieties. God's Messenger declared them to be of the fruit of Paradise."[37] When the call for the sunset prayer sounds, I utter the formula of consecration and put one of them in my mouth. Its delicious, licorice-like taste is utterly unique. Soon the brief repast concludes and we rise with the congregation to worship.

Later that night, I am invited to Mustafa's home for dinner. His residence is a modest villa in a residential area not far from Quba. Joining us are two of his grown sons, his brother, and three erudite male friends. No women are visible, as one would expect in a conservative Saudi household. Surrounded by gilded Louis XIV sofas and chairs, we sit on the carpeted living room floor like Bedouins and dine on a memorable feast of whole roast lamb served on a bed of rice. Much of the animated conversation revolves around the deterioration of Medina's cultural and historical heritage.

The next morning, after a light meal, I make my way to Bab al-Rahma. A thick crowd of worshippers waits before the still bolted door. The scene has something apocalyptic about it. In the depths of the night, like mendicant souls at the threshold of Heaven, we are gathered at the mighty gilded gate of Mercy, eagerly anticipating our admittance into the celestial light within. Ten minutes later, the floodgates open and we stream into the mosque, filling every available space.

Following the prayer, I meet Mustafa and we walk north across the still cool marble to our sedan. I am eager to make the most of my third and final day in the Prophet's City. We drive west and turn north beyond the craggy silhouette of Mount Sila'. Then, penetrating deep into the western lava tract, we reach the imposing, white Mosque of *al-Qiblatayn,* the Two Prayer Orientations. Mustafa explains, "In 624 CE, about sixteen months after the emigration, the Prophet received Divine instructions to change the ritual direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. According to some reports, this occurred while the Prophet was leading a clan of the Helpers in noonday worship at their mosque here. In the middle of the prayer, the command to face the Ka'ba was revealed. So the Prophet changed his position, as did the congregation, with the men and women switching places. Then, facing south instead of north, they completed the rest of the prayer."[38]

We make our way up the steps and into a magnificent prayer hall. As we must wait until the sun rises before performing the devotional greeting to the mosque, I sit and meditate on the significance of this place of worship. While all of Medina's first mosques had to be reoriented, it is fitting that there should be a monument commemorating this important event. When the Prophet was still in Mecca, the Ka'ba was host to a myriad of idols, and the direction of Muslim prayer toward Jerusalem reflected Islam's affinity with the monotheistic faith preached by previous prophets. Later, however, in Medina, the majority of the native Jews proved hostile to the new religion and challenged the Prophet's status and authority. The Qur'an affirms that the Ka'ba was originally erected by Abraham, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian (Qur'an 2:127; 3:68). Thus, God's decree that His Holy House at Mecca should henceforth be the focal point of Muslim devotion served to highlight the primordial nature of Islam. The change of *qibla,* the direction of prayer, differentiated the Muslims in a critical way from the indigenous Jewish tribes of Medina, who continued to pray toward Jerusalem. Once the sun clears the horizon, we perform our individual devotions in the direction of Mecca and then return to our vehicle.

We drive to the southeast past Quba Mosque and turn right. We stop beside an uninspiring cinderblock wall encircling what appears to be a nondescript field scattered with basalt rocks and withered weeds. "The Prophet led the prayers at this spot for several days during the siege of an indigenous Jewish tribe. The commemorative mosque built here was known as Masjid al-Fadikh (The Date Wine Mosque). According to some sources,

the prohibition against consuming alcohol was revealed during the siege.[39] Other reports say that a group of companions were drinking fermented date juice (*fadikh*) here when they received news of the prohibition of alcohol, at which point they poured the contents of their wine skins onto the ground.[40] Thus, the unusual name of this shrine embodies the exemplary obedience of the first Muslims."

Looking into the enclosure again, I discern a pattern of stones arranged upon the ground to mark the demolished shrine's *qibla* wall. Further to the left, I now see that the other rocks are simple tomb markers. The Saudi religious authorities most probably sanctioned the razing of the mosque that originally stood here, based on the prohibition of worshipping at or near graves. "Older sources describe Masjid al-Fadikh as located near the banks of a streambed." Pointing eastward to a concrete canal, Mustafa adds, "The principal headwaters of Wadi Buthan flow there." Then, shaking his head with discernable sadness, he remarks, "Today this historical site is largely unknown, and most people now confuse it with another mosque site further east. Praise be to the One who alters things, but Himself does not change!"

Mustafa now leads me toward a dense grove of date palms to the west. "The face of Medina has changed radically in recent years," he says, "but in gardens such as these one can still get a taste of what it must have been like in the Prophet's day." The narrow road is closed in on both sides by high stone walls of evident antiquity. At a breach in one of the walls, we enter a timeless pastoral world. Filtered by the canopy of palm fronds, sunlight dapples plots of herbs and clover. Here and there are clearings planted with grape vines, pomegranate, and also fruit-bearing lote trees, which figure prominently in descriptions of the celestial realms. Eventually, we come to an archaic masonry complex comprising a wide-mouthed well, and an adjoining reservoir overlooked by a small, arcaded veranda, to which we now ascend. Gazing over the idyllic scene, I am reminded of Qur'anic depictions of Paradise as "gardens beneath which rivers flow." Mustafa excuses himself to chat with a local farmer, leaving me in the coolness of the portico to remember the Supreme Gardener for a blessed half an hour. When he returns, we stroll back to the car in silence.

Our route traverses the agricultural area of southeastern Medina, many of whose inhabitants belong to an indigenous Shiite population. This Imami community has a long history of antagonism and rivalry with the majority Sunni population, who refer to them as *al-Nakhawila,* Workers of the Date Palms. We soon reach the district's main boulevard named after 'Ali, the Prophet's valorous cousin and son-in-law. The city also has modern thoroughfares named in honor of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, who are likewise revered by Sunnis as pillars among the early Companions of the Prophet and as his four righteous successors. However, most Shiites view 'Ali as having been the sole rightful claimant to the title of Commander of the Faithful and, because they historically denied the legitimacy of his

predecessors, they are labeled "rejectionists" by many Sunnis. After 'Ali was assassinated in 661 CE, claims to supreme leadership shifted to his two sons by the Prophet's daughter Fatima and later to their progeny. Over the succeeding centuries, Medina was often a hotbed of Shiite revolt against the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. For hundreds of years, autonomous princes of the lineage of al-Hasan or al-Husayn ruled Mecca and Medina.

A short while later, we come to the eastern perimeter of the Baqi' Graveyard. Eventually, our car stops next to a modest new mosque, surmounted by a single squat minaret. "This is Masjid al-Ijaba (Mosque of the Response), site of the prayer hall of an *Ansari* clan (a clan of Helpers, who welcomed the Prophet Muhammad and his followers to Medina). Its name derives from a personal supplication the Prophet once made after praying here. A hadith relates the Messenger's plea: 'I asked my Lord for three favors, and he granted me two of them, and withheld the third. I asked my Lord not to wipe out my community of followers by famine, and this He granted. I asked Him not to obliterate my community by flood, and this He granted. Finally, I asked Him not to incite them to make war against each other, and this He denied me.'"[41]

It is time for the midday prayer, so we enter. As we wait for the *muezzin*'s second call, I contemplate the hadith cited by Mustafa. By the grace of God, the Prophet had been able to put an end to decades of rancor and armed conflict between Medina's indigenous Arab clans. Forging an alliance of faith between the Helpers and a diverse group of emigrants, the Messenger had brought nearly the whole of the Arabian Peninsula into the fold of Islam by the time of his death in 632 CE. However, without his harmonizing presence and God-given authority, the unity of his theocratic state rapidly showed signs of serious fissures. Much of Abu Bakr's brief rule as first caliph was taken up with repressing bloody secessionist rebellions. Although the dominions of Islam expanded tremendously during the Caliphates of 'Umar and 'Uthman, both were murdered. So was 'Ali, whose five-year reign witnessed almost continual civil strife, in which some of the Prophet's most eminent companions found themselves on opposing sides. Even the sanctuary of Medina was not immune from this internecine bloodshed. In 683 CE, in the nearby eastern lava tract, a local group of pious rebels was slaughtered by the army of the Umayyad Caliph, whose Syrian troops plundered the Prophet's City for three days. By the end of the first Islamic century, political, tribal, ethnic, and theological rifts had given rise to a multitude of endlessly warring factions. How truly and sadly prophetic was the Messenger's exchange with his Lord at this spot!

The noon prayer briefly unifies the focus and movements of the assembled worshippers, and then each one exits the mosque to go in diverse directions. We continue along the inner ring road, which now curves westward. Just before Mount Sila' we turn north and descend toward Uhud. A short while later, we turn right and halt at the bottom of a steep hillock. As we hike up

the sloping road, Mustafa explains that the mosque we are about to visit is linked to the Battle of the Trench. "In the spring of 627 CE, the Meccans again marched against Medina with an allied force of ten thousand warriors, determined to destroy Islam once and for all. The Prophet had received advance warning of the impending attack, and sought counsel on how best to meet the threat. In the end he adopted the innovative proposal of Salman the Persian, to protect Medina's most vulnerable flank by digging a defensive trench between the two lava tracts to the north of Jabal Sila'."

At the top of the prominence, wedged between nondescript houses, we come to the tiny mosque of Masjid al-Raya, Mosque of the Battle Banner. It marks the spot where the Prophet's campaign tent was erected to enable him to supervise the digging of the trench and its subsequent defense. Passing through a modest courtyard, we enter the diminutive prayer chamber, covered by a single low dome. Here, in what feels like a masonry tent, we offer prayers. As we emerge to return to the car, I ask, "Isn't this near the place where the miracle of the rock occurred?"

"Yes, my brother," Mustafa says. "Just to the north of this hill a group of diggers encountered a large rock, which they were unable to break or dislodge. When the Prophet was asked for guidance, he descended to the ditch and shattered the stone himself by striking it three times with a pick. At each blow a great bolt of light shot forth, one to the east, one to the north and one to the south. He later said this was an omen that the Muslims would one day conquer Iraq, Syria and Yemen.[42] Though the hypocrites mocked the Messenger for making this prophecy at a time when the Muslims were being threatened by an overwhelmingly superior enemy at their doorstep, it later proved true."

Mustafa continues his commentary as we drive around the north of Jabal Sila': "The five-kilometer-long ditch had barely been completed when the enemy forces arrived and established their camps to the north. After more than twenty days of relentless siege, the morale, stamina, and even the faith of the thinly stretched lines of defenders began to falter. The desperate condition of the Muslims at this time is described in the Qur'an: 'When you were being assailed from above and from below, and when your vision failed you, and your hearts were in your throats and you began to think strange thoughts about God, then were the believers put to a trial and shaken to their roots'" (Qur'an 73:10–11).

Just then we pull into a broad paved bay on the northwestern flank of Mount Sila', another site associated with the Battle of the Trench known as the Seven Mosques. Pointing to a whitewashed shrine erected on a rocky spur of the mountain to our left, Mustafa tells me, "That is The Mosque of Victory, marking the spot where the Prophet implored God for three consecutive days to come to the aid of the Muslims with this supplication: 'O God! Revealer of the Covenant Scripture, Swift of Reckoning! O God! Vanquish the enemy confederates! O God! Put them to flight and cause them to

tremble!'[43] On the third day, his petition was granted, and he announced that victory was at hand. God then sent troops of angels and a raging gale to wreak havoc upon the camps of the Quraysh and their allies. Terrified and thrown into utter confusion, the assailants soon raised the siege and departed."

By means of a steep set of stone steps, we ascend the outcropping to the mosque. Entering a small walled court, we find the vaulted prayer vestibule tightly packed with pilgrims. While we wait for our turn to pray there, Mustafa reveals a secret: "It is recorded that the Prophet's entreaty was granted on a Wednesday, between the midday prayers and the afternoon prayers. Ever since then, sincere supplications made at this spot and at this time have been known to be answered by God." Today, I realize, *is* Wednesday, and *now* is the propitious hour. When we finally manage to secure the necessary space inside, my devotions are charged with exceptional fervor.

Mustafa suggests that we forgo visiting the other mosques, named in honor of several eminent Companions of the Prophet, in order to reach another more important mosque for the mid-afternoon prayer. We backtrack around Jabal Sila', and eventually find ourselves on the airport road, where I am sadly reminded of my imminent departure.

We are dropped off near the Mosque of Abu Dharr, named after a Bedouin tribesman famed for his great asceticism. But the shrine has a more ancient name, Masjid al-Sajda, Mosque of the Prostration, whose story Mustafa relates: "It is reported that the Prophet once walked from his mosque to an enclosed garden here. Unbeknownst to him, one of the Meccan emigrants had followed him and watched as he made his ritual ablution and prayed at this spot. The Messenger remained in the position of the final prostration for such a long time that his unseen companion feared that God might have taken his soul. Eventually, the Messenger assumed the final kneeling position and completed his devotions. It was then that he noticed he was not alone. His escort told him of the concern he had felt at his protracted prostration, so the Prophet informed him: 'Verily Gabriel, upon whom be Peace, came to me and communicated to me God's glad tidings that whoever blesses me, I will bless, and whoever greets you with a benediction, I will greet. And so I prostrated to God the Mighty, the Majestic.'"[44] We then go in and perform the prayer in honor of the mosque and subsequently join the congregation for mid-afternoon worship. Both rituals include reverential greetings and blessings on the Prophet. I am deeply moved to recall the Divine reciprocity inherent in this act, which constitutes such an important facet of Islamic piety.

Outside, Mustafa recommends that I now return to my hotel to pack my luggage, promising to fetch me for my final sunset meal at the Prophet's Mosque. Not having rested that afternoon, I am dazed with fatigue, but the spiritual nourishment of the day's tour has dissipated every thought of the thirst and hunger. Later, I stroll across the great plaza one last time with Mustafa. In the celestial precincts, we break the fast with heavenly dates

washed down with water from a sacred well. Then we perform the communal prayer toward the *qibla* wall upon which the Messenger saw a vision of the delights of Paradise and the torments of Hell. I end my devotions with a voluntary prayer, remaining in thankful prostration for a prolonged period. Mustafa then escorts me to the Gate of Mercy, where I turn in the direction of the Noble Chamber and offer a closing salutation to the Prophet. Leading with my left foot, I exit while uttering the traditional prayer, "O God! Verily I ask of You Your abundant grace."

Mustafa walks beside me in the direction of the car. Taking my hand, he says, "You know the story of how the Prophet, not long after his emigration to Medina (*hijra*), instituted ties of brotherhood between individual émigrés and the Helpers." "Of course," I reply. "Well, though your emigration has been brief, I regard you as my permanent brother in love for our Prophet and his city."

Deeply moved by his words, I tell him, "You have given me a great gift in the past three days, and I feel I have nothing to give to you in return."

"You are wrong," he interjects, "for your interest in the sacred history and geography of my city has given me hope that Medina's remaining visitation sites will be preserved and remembered for what they embody of the life and times of our blessed Prophet."

At the car, we embrace and exchange final farewells. The journey to the airport takes us across the eastern lava tract beyond Mount Uhud. When we reach the terminal, I thank our driver Ahmed for his faithful service and patience. Inside the departure hall, I check in for my southbound flight to Jeddah, from where I expect to make the long westward trip home. As a departing blessing, I am assigned a window seat.

Once we are airborne, I am offered a dazzling vista of *al-Madina al-Munawwara,* the Luminous City. The most brilliant glow emanates from the *Haram* in the middle of the city. Overflowing into the plaza on three sides, I can vaguely discern the massed rows of the faithful engaged in the night vigil prayers. The scene makes me think of the Prophet's vow: "By Him in Whose hand is my soul, things will revert to how they began; surely all true faith will return to Medina, just as it began from there, until all true faith will be in Medina."[45] It is impossible to escape feelings of profound regret at leaving the Abode of Faith. At the same time, I am filled with immense gratitude. For my sojourn in the Prophet's City has permitted me to partake of the eternal significance of the *Hijra* Emigration, which is, in essence, an inspired movement away from darkness toward the light.

NOTES

(Ed.) following a note signifies that the note was added by the general editor of this set.

1. For a scholarly but dated review of Arabic sources on Medina, see Jean Sauvaget, *La Mosquée Omeyyade de Médine: Etude sur les Origines Architecturales de la Mosquée et de la Basilique* (Paris: Vanoest, 1947).

2. Dates are provided in Common Era format for general readership. The year 622 CE corresponds to year one of the Muslim Hijra dating system based on a lunar calendar.

3. See Daoud Casewit, "Al-Hijrah Between History and Metaphor: An Analysis of Quranic and Hadith Sources," *The Muslim World* 88, no. 2 (April 1998): 105–128.

4. Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 2001), 760, no. 1907; Muhammad Ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Asriya, 2002), 15, no. 1.

5. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 20, no. 15; Muslim, *Sahih,* 41, no. 44.

6. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 207, no. 1189; Muslim, *Sahih,* 517, no. 1397.

7. See Daoud Casewit, "Fada'il al-Madinah: The Unique Distinctions of the Prophet's City," *The Islamic Quarterly,* 35, no. 1 (1991): 5–22.

8. 'Abd al-Razzaq Ibn Humam al-Sana'ani, *Musnaf,* ed., 'Abd al-Rahman al-'Azami, vol. 3 (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1970), 515, no. 6531.

9. 'Umar al-Numayri al-Basri Ibn Shabbah, *Kitab Ta'rikh al-Madina al-Munawwara,* ed., 'Ali Muhammad Dandal and Yasir Sa'd al-Din Bayyan, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 83; Sulayman Ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'jam al-Awsat,* ed., Mahmud al-Tahhan, vol. 2 (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Ma'arif, 1985), 104.

10. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 267–268, no. 1534, no. 1535.

11. The tribe of Quraysh, to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged, controlled Mecca in the seventh century CE. During the time of the Prophet's mission, most of the powerful members of this tribe opposed Islam. The leaders of Quraysh commanded the armies that attempted to attack Medina and destroy the nascent Muslim community. (Ed.)

12. For an in-depth study of the historical geography of *al-'Aliya* see Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies in Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1995).

13. Ibn Shabbah, *Ta'rikh,* 167.

14. Muhammad Ibn 'Abdallah al-Nisaburi al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn,* vol. 5 (Aleppo and Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1978), 560.

15. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 208, no. 1196; Muslim, *Sahih,* 515, no. 1390.

16. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 207, no. 1190; Muslim, *Sahih,* 516, no. 1394.

17. Author's translation of the Arabic text from Ahmed Kamal, *The Sacred Journey* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), 102.

18. Abu Dawud Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistani, *Sunan,* vol. 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1988), 224.

19. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 647, no. 3688; Muslim, *Sahih,* 1017, no. 163.

20. Tabarani, *al-Awsat,* vol. 1, 475–476.

21. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 208, no. 1196; Muslim, *Sahih,* 515, no. 1391.

22. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 358, no. 2095; and 630–631, no. 3584; Muhammad Ibn Yazid Ibn Maja, *Sunan,* ed., Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi (Cairo: 'Isa al-Halabi, no date), no. 1417.

23. Muslim, *Sahih,* 348, no. 974.

24. Tabarani, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir,* vol. 2 (Baghdad: Dar al-'Arabiyya, 1978–1983), 305, no. 13190; Hakim, *al-Mustadrak,* vol. 2, 465–466.

25. Muhammad Ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan,* vol. 5 (Madina: Maktaba al-Salafiya, 1967), 377, no. 4009; Ibn Maja, *Sunan,* no. 3112.

26. For a fuller account of the battle of Uhud, see Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1992).

27. Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi,* ed., Marsden Jones, vol. 1 (London: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1966), 262; 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-Nabawiya,* ed., Taha 'Abd al-Ra'uf Sa'd, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1987), 35.

28. Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira,* 34.

29. Muslim, *Sahih,* 1129, no. 2943.

30. Ibn Maja, *Sunan,* no. 1412; Ibn Shabbah, *Ta'rikh,* 41–42.

31. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 1065, no. 5866; Muslim, *Sahih,* 832, no. 54, 55; Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra,* vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Beirut, 1985), 476.

32. Muslim, *Sahih,* 512, no. 1377; Malik Ibn Anas, *al-Muwatta',* vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-'Ulum, 1988), 885.

33. Ibn Maja, *Sunan,* no. 227; Hakim, *al-Mustadrak,* vol. 1, 91.

34. 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad Ibn Farhun, *Ta'rikh al-Madina al-Munawwara,* ed., Husayn Muhammad 'Ali Shukri (Beirut: Dar al-Arqam, 2001), 29–30.

35. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 179, no. 1013; Muslim, *Sahih,* 320, no. 8.

36. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar Sadir and Maktab al-Islami, 1954), 309.

37. Tirmidhi, *Sunan,* vol. 4, 401, no. 2068; Ibn Maja, *Sunan,* no. 3453, 3455.

38. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat,* vol. 1, 241–243.

39. Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira,* 109.

40. Ibn Shabbah, *Ta'rikh,* 65, 69.

41. Muslim, *Sahih,* 1107, no. 2890; Ibn Shabbah, *Ta'rikh,* 68.

42. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat,* vol. 4, 83–84; Waqidi, *al-Maghazi,* vol. 2, 449–550.

43. Bukhari, *Sahih,* 720, no. 4116; Ibn Shabbah, *Ta'rikh,* 58–50.

44. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* vol. 3, 130, and 129; Hakim, *al-Mustadrak,* vol. 1, 222.

45. Hakim, *al-Mustadrak,* vol. 4, 454; Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa wa ma'rifa ahwal Sahib al-Shari'a,* ed., 'Abd al-Mu'ti Amin Qal'aji, vol. 6 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1985), 330–331.

8

Sparrow on the Prophet's Tomb

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

1

O sparrow perched on a corner of the
Prophet's tomb
cheeping above thousands of bowed heads murmuring,
whose glassy chirps hit high notes of
purity under the eaves in this
Mosque of God's Messenger
that resides in two territories of space—
this world seen, the next world
unseen—

in this shadow existence of his signal presence among us
visitors from even farther away than
China pass by to greet him,
and in your little feathered body is the swooping freedom to
come and go all day to visit him
speeding from a tall beam
across choruses of hearts
gratefully weeping or tranquil with an ecstatic
inner moon rise

just to be here.

2

Sparrow, what is your name? Is it *"Constant Devotion?"*
Is it *"I Want To Be Near?" "Praiseworthy Friend?"*
Is your name *"Generations To Come?"*
You fluff your breast and preen your wing
where men cannot go, you dart into the
dark of the tomb for deeper conversation.

We would all go with you if we could,
squeeze our tiny feathery bodies through the
  gold grille work, past the
    guards in their pea green uniforms,
to sit on a corner of the Prophet's tomb in the
  dark to hear him
return the salutations of
such outpouring awed adorations of men and women,
    each one
passing by that undying presence, trying to
sneak a peak through the golden porthole,
hearts boiling with overwhelming emotions.

You land and sing.
You cock your head.
You watch us from your high perch with a
    cool eye.

3

Sparrow, you are more than a sparrow.
You are a continent of sparrows.
You are The Minister of Internal Affairs of all
    sparrows.
You are the song that laces the margins of the deep message,
  the message of God's Magnificence, the
Thunder of Tremendous Shock, Earthquake and
    heaven crash of the
Stark Glare of God's Might.

You trill and fly,
your song like a tiny tune from paradise,
  delicate celesta of celestial light.

The mosque in Medina expands
all the way to the
ends of the earth.

Forget about walls, where
marble pillars mark
the mosque's original dimensions,
the Prophet's precincts now
encompass our houses and the
invisible courtyards of our
love, interconnected by
sparrow-song, perched on a
Turkish cornice,
singing to Timbuktu,

Medina song bird
heard around the
world!

NOTE

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9

In the Realm of Mercy: A Visit to a Shiite Shrine

Karima Diane Alavi

It is my last Friday—the Muslim day of communal prayer—in Iran. After a 26-year absence from the country, my first return is coming to a close. I gaze out the window that overlooks the city of Shiraz and I am filled with memories of my time here as an exchange student. Raw emotions make their way to the surface, as I wonder if I will ever make it back again. I feel a strong need to leave my fellow tourists behind and head to a sacred site—one of the city's many shrines—where I can be alone with my thoughts; alone in a crowd of fellow believers. I do not try to understand this need. I just recall the words of my grandmother: "Listen to the voice within you. It's the voice of wisdom." Although I dress in traditional Islamic clothing, I know that my blue eyes and light skin reveal my Western origin. With a touch of trepidation about how Iranians might react to a foreigner in their shrine, I force my hands to open the drawer that holds my veil.

I leave the hotel wrapped in a black shroud that enables me to fade into the world of the sacred, as if I had surrounded myself in eternal prayer that keeps the touch of the profane away from my skin, my face, and my heart. I cannot help but chuckle at the Western feminists who will never know the delicious anonymity one gains under a veil. As they speak of rescuing me from the "oppression" of becoming a drop in a sea of black fabric, I luxuriate in the freedom from trying to be someone special, someone different, a person who seeks everyone else's admiration and approval. I turn away from this world and focus on God.

The shrine rises like a glistening mountain of gold and blue. The ceramic tiles of the minaret call me to a higher place and my spirit—which is so fragile on this day—rises to the sunny sky above me while clouds drift by as if they have all the time in the world. "They do," I tell myself, and lower my head, humbled by their beauty. My heart beats to an ancient rhythm as I take my first steps through the shadow of the minaret that lays prostrate across the central courtyard and points toward the door of the inner shrine.

I follow the other women and enter the door only to encounter a man who is quietly telling the men to continue straight, while the women are directed to walk through a black curtain to the right. Stooping forward, I make my way through the layers of fabric that separate the men's area from the women's, and all is dark. For a short moment, I have the sensation of traveling through a womb, wrapped in warmth and heading toward an exit that will lead me to unknown territory. I gasp when I emerge, enshrouded in shimmering lights that seem to come from another world. My eyes are immediately drawn to the ceiling: a domed structure completely covered in mirrors with delicate chandeliers swaying in a slight breeze. Light is everywhere.

Women engulf me in a sea of prayers and tears. They sweep me along their river of movement toward the tomb. Though I want to stop and look, I cannot fight the flow. I surrender and touch the wall to my left to steady myself as the crowd pushes toward their ultimate goal—the final resting place of Sayyed Amir Ahmad, brother of one of the twelve Shi'a Imams, saintly men who are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

The tomb is enclosed in walls of gold and silver that are decorated with Qur'anic verses and arabesque filigree. In the center, several arched openings become windows to the world of the afterlife, where the grave sits in silent repose. Each window is filled with a metal lattice that women cling to in devotion while they pray for their loved ones who are suffering from illness, sorrow, or the inability to conceive that greatest gift of all, a child. Their hands hang on to the grid and their bodies shake with sobs, filling the room with an intense longing for God's mercy to be shown to those for whom their hearts ache.

I am suddenly overwhelmed with thoughts of my brother's daughter, who had just been in a car accident, and had held on to her best friend whose life quietly flowed away and drifted to a place unknown. Tears stream down my face and I find solace in holding on to the bars of the shrine and feeling the hands of the other women pat mine gently before moving on. I think of the Iraqis who are burying their children in between bombing raids that drop from the sky as if heaven and hell have been reversed, making death come down like rain. An overwhelming weight comes upon me and I have to sit before I succumb to its power and fall to the ground.

Making my way to one of the marbled walls of the shrine, I slump to the floor and cover my face in the safety of the veil. All else drifts away and I beseech God to help my niece and all the other people who have suffered the final gaze of the ones they love. I have no concept of how long I remained there, wrapped in my own world, when a soft touch on the shoulder brings me back to the room that glistens with rays of light bouncing off the ceiling and showering us with its grace.

"*Khanoom,* Ma'am."

I look up to see the rugged, sun-dried face of a village woman who had obviously spent much of her life toiling in a field.

"*Khanoom,* Ma'am. Who are you crying for?" she asks.

"*Dohktareh baradar-eh man*. The daughter of my brother."

"What happened?"

"Her friend died, and she was hurt," is all I can say before crying again. The woman stands up and walks to the wall that separates the men from the women. It is just a couple of feet taller than the top of our heads, and she must have heard her husband's voice on the other side of the wall. "Hossein," she calls.

"Yes?"

"Tell all the men to pray for the foreigner's niece."

I hear the sound of a man telling everyone to pray for my brother's child. The voices of at least a hundred men hum with prayer. On our side of the wall, the other women look at me, raise their palms in the air and pray. It is then that I realize that I am the only person who came to this shrine alone; everyone else is with family and friends. They sit in tightly knit groups and comfort each other—sometimes laughing, sometimes crying—and I sense an enormous loss for not being part of a group of women this day. Yet I am surrounded by their loving prayers, and I feel threads of destiny weaving us together in an endless tapestry of mothers, daughters, and sisters who have shared this blessing of life since the dawn of time. My loneliness drifts away like embers in the night.

Those seated along the wall inch toward me until I am embraced between the shoulders of two women I would share this moment with, but never get to know. They have powerful shoulders that speak of strength—of lifting rocks and sowing fields before the setting sun allows them to surrender to the day's exhaustion.

I find comfort in our shared silence as we wrap chadors over our faces and peer out at the crowd that moves past us like moments in eternal time. Because I am seated on the floor, what I see first is the women's feet. As they move along, their veils open up just enough to reveal their life stories to me. There are ancient feet with bony lumps bulging from the side; feet that have walked so many miles of life that they seem weary and ready for eternal rest. There are delicate city feet with golden bracelets resting peacefully on the ankle. One woman hobbles along with a wrinkled clubfoot covered in the brown-black skin of southern Iran where Arab tribes have lived since migrating there centuries ago.

Shimmering fabrics in red and green swish past me as Qashqai tribal women take time from their mountain migrations to seek the blessings of the venerated man whose body rests a few feet to my left. The gold threads that are woven into their skirts flash rays of light across space and time as the women seem to float along the marble floor. I am in awe of their ability to maintain traditions in the onslaught of our televised McWorld. Enormous silver bracelets jingle around their wrists as they move to the back of the shrine to perform their prayers.

The women next to me slowly drift into a gentle slumber and I rise to say goodbye to this mystical place before heading back to the outside world. I wander in silence and take in the sights for the last time. Prayers are engraved in marble slabs along the walls that women touch as they recite the Qur'an. Ceramic tiles in brilliant blue and white reflect the flood of light that pours down from the mirrored ceiling, filling the room with a blaze of white. I watch two little girls in blue jeans and pink sweatshirts dancing in front of a floor fan as their grandmother looks on affectionately. There are grown women lying with their heads on their mother's laps. Their heavy eyelids rise and fall in an effort to take in all the sights and sounds before it is time to depart. I understand their need to make the experience last.

Meandering slowly toward the door, I recall one of my favorite verses of the Qur'an, the verse about light:

> God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
> The parable of His Light is as if there was a niche,
> And within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass
> The glass, as it were, a brilliant star lit from a blessed tree
> An olive, neither of the East nor of the West
> Whose oil is well nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it
> Light upon light! God doth set forth parables for people
> And God doth know all things.
>
> (Qur'an 24:35)

I take one last look at the women who surround the tomb and bend down to reenter the black cloth that leads to the outdoor courtyard of the shrine. Suddenly, a clap of thunder shatters the air and shouts of "Alhamdu Lillah!" (God be praised!) echo through the crowd like a wave of joy. I step into that enchanted mixture of sunshine and rain that has puzzled me since I was a child. Wrapping my chador around me, I run across the glistening pavement to the columned portico on the other side of the courtyard. The delicately carved wooden pillars have eagerly absorbed the rain and are already filling the air with the musky scent of their ancient lives.

I turn around and feel a joy like I have never encountered before. It seems to rise on wings from the horizon of my soul and embrace the sunlight, the raindrops, and the whimsical scene before me, where people are laughing and covering each other with jackets, chadors, and oversized purses. I see the touch of God's plan for our salvation and it is Love.

It is time to leave, and yet I have no remorse. A content serenity embraces me as I lift my hand and quietly call for a taxi. A young Mullah jumps out from the passenger's seat to open the back door for me, hesitating momentarily when he notices my foreign features. Smiling sheepishly, he waits till I am seated and then jumps back into the car. In typical Iranian fashion, we will share a taxi through this wonderful city and then never see each other again.

I smile behind my veil and watch the taxi driver and the Mullah trying to make sense of me without staring; the rearview mirror seems to hold a new fascination for them. They give each other puzzled looks and then we joyfully splash through puddles of God's mercy as we pull away from the shrine, listening to the comforting rhythm of the rain on the roof of our car.

10

The Passion of ‘Ashura in Shiite Islam

Kamran Scot Aghaie

Shortly after American and coalition troops removed Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq in 1983, people around the world witnessed an amazing phenomenon. In the days leading up to the Shiite commemoration of ‘Ashura, hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of people poured onto the Iraqi streets and began passionately beating their chests and heads with their hands and chains, while chanting religious elegies, prayers, and slogans. A few even used blades to draw blood as the world watched in confusion, shock, and disbelief. This massive outpouring of religious sentiment was due in part to decades of frustration at the restrictions that were placed by the Sunni but largely secular Baathist regime of Hussein on Shiite public religious practices in Iraq. Being able to commemorate ‘Ashura freely was an important event for the Shiites of Iraq. But what was the world to make of the apparently violent and self-abusive rituals of ‘Ashura? Many Sunni and non-Muslim observers thought that the participants must be crazy. Many thought that they must be extremist religious zealots. However, those who were familiar with Shi‘ism and its distinctive rituals realized, despite the shocking impression these rituals left in the minds of many people around the world, that by and large the participants were ordinary Shiites involved in traditional expressions of piety and spirituality. In order to properly understand these rituals it is first necessary to understand the historical development of the symbols and rituals associated with the day of ‘Ashura, which is at the core of the beliefs of Shiite Muslims.

‘Ashura is the 10th day of the month of Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic calendar. The day of ‘Ashura is important to Muslims for two main reasons. First, the Prophet Muhammad identified the 10th of Muharram as a holy day of fasting.[1] Second, it was the day on which the tragic massacre of Karbala took place in 680 CE, in which the Prophet’s grandson Husayn was killed along with most of his close family members. The symbols and rituals of ‘Ashura have evolved over time and have meant different things to different people. However, at the core of the symbolism

of ‘Ashura is the moral dichotomy between worldly injustice and corruption on the one hand, and God-centered justice, piety, sacrifice, and perseverance on the other. Also, Shiite Muslims consider the remembrance of the tragic events of ‘Ashura to be an important way of worshiping God in a spiritual or mystical way. The emotional reactions of believers to the tragedy of ‘Ashura are thought to build a closer relationship between the individual Shiite Muslim and the martyred Imam Husayn, who serves as an intermediary between God and the average believer. It is said that if a believer sheds even one tear for the tragedy of ‘Ashura, he or she is guaranteed admission to Paradise.

Politically, the symbolism of ‘Ashura has been important in many rebellions and reform movements throughout Muslim history, such as in the overthrow of the Umayyad caliphs by the Abbasid caliphs in 749–750 CE. More recently, in Iran, the symbolism of ‘Ashura was a central part of the antimonarchy discourse of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and in Lebanon the symbolism of ‘Ashura played an important role in promoting Shiite communal identity and in mobilizing Shiites against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Central to the political dynamic of ‘Ashura has been its association with the tragic massacre of Husayn and his followers at Karbala. As a commemoration of Karbala, ‘Ashura serves as a vindication of the Shiite cause and also provides the foundation for a diverse array of beliefs and rituals, such as mourning rituals, funeral-style commemorative processions, verbal and performed reenactments of the events at Karbala, self-mortification rituals, and of course, politically oriented rallies and speeches. However, the commemoration of ‘Ashura has not always been associated exclusively with sectarianism or even with Shi‘ism. Many non-Shiite Muslims, especially those oriented toward popular Islam, also commemorate ‘Ashura. For example, in Sunni countries like Egypt and Morocco, Muslims commemorate ‘Ashura in ways that are distinct from Shiite practices. In the twentieth century, Sunni involvement in the commemoration of Karbala has gone through a relative decline, whereas among Shiites it has continued to evolve and change as it did in previous centuries.

This being said, the sectarian aspect of ‘Ashura is critically important to understanding the significance of this commemoration. Islam, like other world religions, has always been characterized by a great deal of internal diversity. One of the most important examples of diversity in Islam is the Sunni–Shiite divide. Today, Sunnis make up approximately 85 to 90 percent of the Muslims in the world, while Shiites constitute approximately 10 to 15 percent. While Shiites live all over the Muslim world, approximately half of them live in Iran. The other major concentrations of Shiites are in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, eastern Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan, and various parts of South Asia. In many of these countries, Shiites are either a minority or a majority who have little or no influence in the government. Today, the only explicit Shiite government is the Islamic

Republic of Iran, which was established through revolutionary upheaval in 1978–1979. At the moment, Iraq seems to be heading toward a Shiite-dominated state, but if the country remains unified its constitution precludes an explicit Shiite government. A small ‘Alawi (also called Nusayri) Shiite minority dominates the Syrian government, but the Syrian Baath regime, as was case of Baathist Iraq under Hussein, is explicitly secular in nature. The same is true for Yemen, where Zaydi Shiites are present in considerable numbers.

Shi‘ism has numerous internal divisions, such as the Ismailis, Zaydis, ‘Alawis, and of course, the Ithna’ ‘Asharis or Twelvers. The roots of the divisions among different strains of Shi‘ism can be found in the historical development of Shi‘ism in the centuries after the Prophet Muhammad’s death. The distinctions between these different branches of Shi’ism are based on different legal systems, ritual practices, and theological doctrines. More specifically, these different Shiite groups have historically disagreed among themselves regarding the identity, nature, and sequence of the Shiite Imams. The office of the Imam, called the *Imamate,* is a distinctive feature of all branches of Shi‘ism. It is both the primary difference between Sunnis and Shiites, and the basis of internal disputes among Shiites, which led to the diversity of Shiite groups. Because they are the largest single Shiite group and because their celebrations of ‘Ashura are the most prominent, this chapter will focus on the Ithna’ ‘Ashari, or Twelver, branch of Shi‘ism. Also called Imami Shiites, the name of this sect derives from the belief that there were 12 Shiite Imams, the last of whom has existed in a supernatural or metaphysical state of occultation since 874 CE.

The sectarian division between the Sunnis and the Shiites took several centuries to fully develop. Upon the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE, there was a crisis of succession. The main challenge facing the young Muslim community was who should succeed the Prophet and in what capacity. It was also unclear whether the Prophet had selected a successor. The imperial caliphate is the system of government that eventually evolved out of this crisis. According to this system, the Islamic state was ruled by a caliph, who commanded both temporal and religious authority, but did not possess any of the supernatural or metaphysical qualities of the Prophet, such as infallibility, supernatural knowledge, or the ability to receive revelation. While some Muslims supported the ruling caliphs, others believed that the Prophet’s son-in-law and cousin ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib should have succeeded the Prophet upon his death. Later, they believed that ‘Ali’s descendants should be his successors, beginning with his sons Hasan (d. 669 CE) and Husayn (d. 680 CE). These Muslims are typically referred to as *‘Alids* because of their support for ‘Ali and his descendants.

These Muslims believed that the Prophet selected ‘Ali as his successor on more than one occasion before his death. For example, they believed that the Prophet gave a speech shortly before his death at a place called Ghadir

Khum. According to one account, "[The Prophet] took ʿAli by the hand and said to the people: ʿDo you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: ʿYes!' Then he took ʿAli's hand and said: ʿOf whomsoever I am Lord [*Mawla*], then ʿAli is also his Lord. O God! Be thou the supporter of whomever supports ʿAli and the enemy of whomever opposes him."[2]

Over the centuries support for ʿAli and his descendants slowly evolved into a theory of leadership called the Imamate. The Imamate differed from the Sunni caliphate in that the Imam had to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and was usually considered to have supernatural qualities and abilities, such as infallibility and supernatural religious knowledge. The Imam also had to be appointed by either the Prophet or the previous Imam in an unbroken chain of succession leading back to the Prophet. According to this view, the Prophet endorsed the Imamate before his death in 632 CE.[3] Sunnis and Shiites have passionately disagreed about both the authenticity and the correct interpretation of these accounts. The crisis of succession after the Prophet's death, followed by a series of political events that unfolded during the first few centuries of Islamic history, turned what was originally a political dispute into a religious or sectarian division.[4]

In response to this crisis of succession, Sunnis developed the doctrine that the caliphs, especially the so-called Rightly-Guided Caliphs—Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE), ʿUmar (d. 644 CE), ʿUthman (d. 656 CE), and ʿAli (d. 661 CE)—were all legitimate successors to the Prophet Muhammad. The caliphs, who were selected as a result of a political process, were generally considered as both religious and temporal leaders, but were not given the same degree of religious authority as Shiites attributed to the Imams. Shiites considered all of the caliphs except ʿAli to be usurpers of the rightful authority that should have been vested exclusively in the Imams. During the early centuries of Islam, Sunnis tended to be the rulers of the Islamic state, while Shiites were in the opposition. This partly explains the tendency of early Sunnis to preserve the status quo, versus the Shiites who tended to be more critical of rulers and who spoke in more radically utopian terms. While Shiite states eventually developed, particularly in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, the long-term political influence of Shiʿism was often at its greatest when it took the form of opposition movements that challenged the legitimacy of the ruling Sunni caliphs.

This fundamental disagreement was compounded by later political divisions, which encouraged further divergence in political and legal systems, ritual practices, and theological doctrines. Despite their differing views, relations between Sunnis and Shiites have varied dramatically throughout history, ranging from open conflict or hostility, to relative tolerance and coexistence.

The terms *Shiʿa* and *Shiite* derive from the Arabic phrase *Shiʿat ʿAli*, "Partisans of ʿAli." The term *Sunni* derives from the phrase *Ahl al-Sunna*

wa al-Jama‘a, which means, ‘‘Followers of the [Prophetic] Tradition and the [Majority] Consensus.’’ As these terms imply, the Shiites support the Prophet Muhammad’s progeny as his successors, beginning with ‘Ali. Thus, the concept of Sunni orthodoxy developed largely in response to Shiite ideological and political challenges. While the disputes and schisms may have begun with the crisis of succession, they evolved in accordance with later political and theological trends. For example, regional, ethnic, or tribal loyalties frequently sparked political rebellions. Sectarian rhetoric often accompanied such rebellions. Proto-Shiite arguments were often the most effective way to challenge the legitimacy of the ruling caliphs. The Shiite Imams, who were descendants of the Prophet and who had varying degrees of popular support among the masses, were considered rivals of the Sunni caliphs, who actually ruled the Islamic empire.

When ‘Ali assumed the position of caliph in 656 CE after the assassination of ‘Uthman, the Prophet’s widow ‘A’isha, with a group from among the Companions of the Prophet, took up arms and challenged ‘Ali’s authority at the Battle of the Camel, which was so named because the fighting took place around the camel on which ‘A’isha rode. In some sources ‘A’isha is reported to have stated, ‘‘By Allah! ‘Uthman has been killed unjustly, and I will seek revenge for his blood!’’[5] No sooner had ‘Ali put down this rebellion, when he was faced with another military challenge from the powerful governor of Syria, Mu‘awiya. Mu‘awiya was a cousin of ‘Uthman, and he similarly demanded that the murderers of ‘Uthman be brought to justice, something that ‘Ali was either unable or unwilling to do. This military challenge resulted in a stalemate, and eventually an arbitrated settlement. The unsatisfactory outcome of this conflict turned a small group of zealous supporters against ‘Ali. These rebels, who were referred to as *Khawarij* (‘‘secessionists’’), condemned ‘Ali for failing to decisively crush Mu‘awiya’s rebellion. Although ‘Ali defeated the Khawarij, one of their adherents assassinated him in 661 CE. Ironically, this set the stage for Mu‘awiya to assume the office of caliph, thus ending the period of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and establishing the Umayyad Caliphate, which lasted for nearly a century.

The Umayyad period of Islamic history is critically important for understanding the schism that developed between the Sunnis and the Shiites. During this period, ‘Ali’s descendants, especially his sons Hasan and Husayn, were increasingly perceived by opposition groups as the ideal rivals of the Umayyad caliphs because of their piety and their relationship to the Prophet. For this reason, Mu‘awiya and his successors were particularly hostile toward these supporters of ‘Ali and his sons. It was routine for the Umayyads to condemn or persecute the family of ‘Ali, and they were even cursed from the pulpit. It is in this environment of tension, distrust, and conflict, along with the crisis resulting from the death of Mu‘awiya and the accession to the throne of his unpopular son Yazid I (d. 683 CE), that the battle of Karbala took place in 680 CE.

The battle of Karbala was the ultimate climax of this dizzying series of conflicts, battles, and debates. In many ways it is the most important symbolic event for Shiites since the Prophet Muhammad's mission, because it is the ultimate and ideal example of the Sunni–Shiite conflict. It serves as a religious model for behavior among Shiites, who are expected to struggle against injustice in the path of God, even if they face oppression, persecution, or death. It is no surprise, therefore, that the vast majority of Shiite rituals are derived from events that are believed to have taken place in or around the battle of Karbala.

Like many other famous historical events, the tale of Karbala has been told and retold over the centuries without a single authoritative version emerging to completely supplant all others. The most commonly accepted narratives of the battle of Karbala begin with an account of the discontent of the Muslims of southern Iraq under the rule of the second Umayyad caliph, Yazid. Yazid is typically portrayed as politically oppressive and morally corrupt. The Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn, who was living in Medina, received several letters from the caliph's subjects asking him to travel to Iraq in order to lead them in an uprising against Yazid. After sending scouts to assess the situation, Husayn and a number of his close relatives left Medina and began the trip to Iraq.

When they reached Karbala, Husayn's caravan was surrounded by an overwhelmingly large army sent by Yazid. A standoff ensued, because Husayn refused to give an oath of allegiance to the caliph. After 10 days of waiting, negotiating, and occasionally fighting, a final battle took place in which Husayn, all of his adult male relatives and supporters, and some of the women and children were killed in a brutal fashion. The surviving women and children, along with Husayn's adult son ʻAli Zayn al-ʻAbidin (d. 712–713 CE), who was too ill to take part in the fighting, were taken captive and transported, along with the heads of the martyrs, to Yazid's court in Damascus.

Along the way from Karbala to Damascus, the members of the Prophet's family who were taken prisoner were exhibited in chains in the public markets of the cities through which they passed. Because of this humiliation, Husayn's surviving relatives, especially his sister Zaynab and his son ʻAli, condemned Yazid for his cruelty toward the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The role played by women, such as Zaynab, in the events of Karbala and their aftermath is an important focus in Shiite recreations of the Karbala tragedy. Their ordeal of captivity is understood by Shiites to be a terrible injustice and humiliation, especially considering that the prisoners were direct descendants or relatives of the Prophet Muhammad. This captivity also provided an opportunity for Husayn's sister Zaynab to assume a political role by publicly challenging the Umayyad Caliph Yazid. For example, in the following Shiite account, Zaynab rebukes Yazid, saying:

> You are not a human being. You are not human. You are an oppressor who inherited bloodthirsty oppression from your father! Even though my heart is wounded and wearied, and my tears are flowing [because of the massacre of Karbala], surely very soon the day of God’s punishment will come and everyone will be subjected to God’s justice. This is sufficient for us.... If fate has brought me here to face you this was not something that I wished to happen. But now that it is so, I count you as small and I reproach you![6]

The entire Muslim community was deeply traumatized by the massacre of Karbala, both because Muslims were killing other Muslims and because the ruling caliph had ordered his troops to massacre the pious descendants of the Prophet. The events of Karbala were also related to earlier traumatic events, like the Battle of the Camel between ‘Ali and ‘A’isha, and the Battle of Siffin between ‘Ali and Mu‘awiya, in which pious and respected Muslims fought on both sides. This negative feeling was compounded by the fact that for many Muslims Husayn and Yazid represented two opposite ends of a religious spectrum. Yazid was widely condemned as impious, tyrannical, and immoral, whereas Husayn was generally seen as being not unlike his grandfather Muhammad or his father ‘Ali in his piety, character, and conduct.

Following Karbala, groups in opposition to the Umayyads routinely used the memory of this battle as a rallying cry. Some of these movements were explicitly Shiite, while others were simply hostile toward the Umayyads and looked favorably upon the family of the Prophet. In fact, the Abbasids, who overthrew the Umayyads in 750 CE and established a new Sunni caliphate, made extensive use of the memory of Karbala to gain popular support during their rebellion. However, once they came to power, they ruled over their empire as a Sunni dynasty for the next five centuries.

Mourning for Husayn and the martyrs of Karbala began almost immediately after the massacre, starting with the laments of Husayn’s surviving relatives and supporters. As part of the long-term trend toward the development of mourning rituals based on commemoration of Karbala, popular elegies of the martyrs were composed during the remainder of the Umayyad period and the first two centuries of Abbasid rule (ca. 750–930 CE). The following is a short excerpt from one of these elegies:

> Now listen to the story of the martyrdom and how [the Umayyads] deprived Hussein of water, and when he was fighting on the plain of Kerbela how they behaved meanly and unjustly. They cut off the head of a descendant of the Prophet in that fiery land! But the Imam lives, his foot in the stirrup and mounted upon his horse! He will not be killed!...The angels in heaven bewailed their deaths and have wept so copiously that water flowed from the leaves of the trees and plants. Thus, you too must weep for a while; for after this tragedy of Taff, laughter is unlawful.[7]

The earliest reliable account of the public mourning rituals that Shiites now call *Muharram* processions concerns an event that took place in 963 CE during the reign of Mu'izz al-Dawla, the Buyid Sultan of southern Iran and Iraq. The Buyids were military commanders from the Caspian Sea region of Iran that ruled in the name of the Sunni Abbasid caliphs. The Buyids, who were Shiites themselves, promoted Shiite rituals, including the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's designation of 'Ali at Ghadir Khum, in order to promote their legitimacy and to strengthen the sense of Shiite identity in and around Baghdad. The famous fourteenth-century Sunni historian Ibn Kathir states, "On the tenth of Muharram of this year [963 CE], Mu'izz al-Dawla ibn Buwayh, may God disgrace him, ordered that the markets be closed, that the women should wear coarse woolen hair cloth, and that they should go into the markets with their faces unveiled and their hair disheveled, beating their faces and wailing over Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib." He goes on, somewhat apologetically to say, "The people of the Sunna could not prevent this spectacle because of the large number of the Shiites and their increasing power, and because the Sultan was on their side."[8] One of the interesting aspects of this account is that it demonstrates that women have been involved in Shiite rituals from the very beginning and that their role was significant enough to be singled out for comment.

Shiite rituals continued to evolve somewhat unsystematically over the centuries in isolated communities, and under the patronage of regional Shiite notables or rulers. Then, in the sixteenth century, the Safavid dynasty established a Shiite state centered on the Iranian plateau and worked systematically to enhance their religious legitimacy by promoting explicitly Shiite rituals. This turned out to be a watershed event for Ithna' 'Ashari Sh'ism and the rituals associated with it. Unlike their Sunni neighbors the Ottomans, the Uzbeks, and the Mughals, the Safavids declared Ithna' 'Ashari Shi'ism to be the official religion of the dynasty and set out to promote an orthodox Shiite culture, society, and political order. It was in this environment in 1501–1502 CE that the popular religious orator Husayn Va'iz Kashifi composed his seminal work, *Rawzat al-shuhada'* (The Garden of the Martyrs).[9] Kashifi's book represents a new trend in Shiite memorial literature, which involves a synthesis of historical accounts, elegiac poems, theological tracts, and hagiographies in a chain of short narratives that together formed a much larger narrative of Karbala. This book also articulated a complex set of canonized doctrines, which stressed the courage, piety, and sacrifice of Husayn and his followers at Karbala.

The new *Rawza* genre of pious narratives was read aloud at religious gatherings, which progressively evolved into mourning rituals called *Rawza Khani,* which roughly means, "Reading the *Rawza*" (that is, reading the book, *Rawzat al-shuhada'*). Today, the *Rawza Khani* is a ritual in which a sermon is given based on *Rawzat al-shuhada'* or some similar text, with a great deal of improvisation on the part of a specially trained orator.

The objective of the oration is to move the audience to tears through the recitation of the tragic details of the battle of Karbala.[10] This type of mourning ritual is viewed by Shiite Muslims as a means of achieving salvation by developing empathy and sympathy for the martyrs. This belief is illustrated by the often-repeated quotation, “Anyone who cries for Husayn or causes someone to cry for Husayn shall go directly to Paradise.”[11]

By the time of the Qajar Dynasty in Iran (ca. 1796–1925), the Rawza Khani had evolved into a much more elaborate ritual called *Shabih Khani* or *Ta‘ziyeh Khani*. The *ta‘ziya* (“lamentation”), an elaborate theatrical performance of the Karbala story based on the same narratives used in the Rawza Khani, involves a large cast of professional and amateur actors, a director, a staging area, costumes, and props. The Qajar rulers of Iran were great sponsors of these rituals, and social and religious status among the elites were based partly on their ability to sponsor such rituals on a large scale. These rituals, which were also sponsored by a variety of social groups organized around guilds, neighborhoods, tribes, or ethnic groups, also reinforced a variety of social identities. The Iranian Ta‘ziyeh ritual reached its greatest level of popularity during the late Qajar period. It entered a relative decline under the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979) and became much less common in the large cities of Iran during the 1930s and the 1940s. However, the Ta‘ziyeh continues to exist on a smaller scale in Iran in the traditional quarters of cities and in rural areas.[12]

In the past two centuries, the policies and agendas of the various regimes ruling Iran have influenced manifestations of ‘Ashura. However, these symbols and rituals have proven to be substantially independent of the control of the state. The state’s ability to make use of the Karbala paradigm has been a very important factor in its ability to maintain its legitimacy and at least some degree of connection or integration with the broader society. The state’s failure to adequately incorporate these symbols and rituals into its program and ideology, as was the case with the Pahlavi regime, contributed in part to the state’s crisis of legitimacy. This allowed opposition groups to make very effective use of the symbols and rituals of ‘Ashura in overthrowing the regime. The government of the present Islamic Republic of Iran has made very effective use of these symbols and rituals to articulate the state’s ideology and policies. This has made it difficult for anyone critical of the Islamic regime to use ‘Ashura symbols and rituals to critique or oppose the state. However, this state versus opposition dynamic is only part of the modern story of ‘Ashura.

‘Ashura symbols and rituals remain very important in modern Iranian society, culture, and politics. Although they have exercised an important influence upon the fortunes of the state, the state itself has usually not been the most important factor in the evolution of Karbala symbols and rituals. Rather than a “trickle down” effect, according to which the state’s policies determined the nature of these diverse forms of religious expression,

the relationship between the state and the society was complex, inconsistent, and above all, a ''two-way street.'' In other words, religious symbols and rituals were produced through a complex process of interaction between the Iranian state and the Iranian society. Much of the evolution of religious expression in Iran was the product of factors that had little or nothing to do with the state. Karbala symbols and rituals have been one of the primary means of expressing social and political ideals on a broad societal level. In some cases, this took the form of direct opposition to the state. In other cases, the rituals that commemorated Karbala served as a means for maintaining social bonds, ideals, and identities that were independent of the agendas and policies of the state. Changing economic and demographic forces transformed preexisting and newly emerging political relationships. Other important factors included changes in ethics, aesthetics, class dynamics, social institutions, groupings, and identities. Discourses on contemporary social and political crises have also found expression in ʻAshura symbols and rituals.

Over the centuries, Shiʻism spread from Iraq and Iran into parts of South Asia. According to popular belief in South Asia, Shiite rituals were first introduced at the end of the fourteenth century by the conqueror Timur Leng (Tamerlane, d. 1405 CE), who is said to have converted to Shiʻism prior to his invasion of the Indian Subcontinent.[13] As Juan Cole has argued, Shiʻism spread along with the migration of Iranian elites (that is, notables, scholars, poets, artisans, and merchants) from the Iranian plateau and Iraq into South Asia. One important side effect of this influx of Iranians was the establishment of an elite culture that was largely derived from Persian elite culture. In some cases, this elite culture was Shiite, which led to the spread of Shiʻism in parts of South Asia. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Shiite states were established in Southern India. For example, the Nizam Shahi dynasty (r. 1508–1553 CE) ruled in Ahmednagar, the Qutb Shahi dynasty (r. 1512–1687 CE) ruled in Hyderabad, and the ʻAdil Shahi dynasty ruled in the Deccan kingdom of Bijapur. These dynasties were able, in varying degrees, to encourage Shiite practices, until the Mughal Dynasty suppressed them from the sixteenth century onward.[14]

While the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries CE were characterized by Shiite rule in certain provinces of South Asia, one should be careful not to overstate the importance of these political trends. In many ways, the spread of Persian elite culture was a more influential factor in the spread of Shiʻism in South Asia. This is particularly important to note for northern Indian areas like Kashmir and Awadh, where large Shiite minorities lived, mostly under Sunni rule. This elite culture survived well into the modern period and was quite influential in certain areas, where Shiite elites (including some women) promoted Shiite beliefs and ritual practices, depending on the degree of tolerance of the Sunni rulers. For example, elegies were recited both in private and in public, public processions were sometimes organized, and the Karbala Narrative was recalled in the form of sermons and domestic rituals

in the homes of Shiite elites. In addition, replicas of the tomb of Husayn were built for use in these various rituals and remain a central feature of South Asian Muharram rituals to this day.[15]

Similar trends can be seen among the Arab Shiite communities that were located outside of Safavid control. In Iraq and Lebanon, major Shiite communities flourished under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which fluctuated between tolerance and persecution. In fact, during the eighteenth century, when political decentralization, economic chaos, and Afghan invasions weakened the religious establishment in the Iranian plateau, the Shiite shrine cities of southern Iraq, in particular Najaf and Karbala, flourished relatively independently of state influence. The important influence of Iraqi Shiite scholarship continued into the nineteenth century as well. During the period of decline of Iran's religious establishment, many of the greatest Shiite scholars either were from Iraq or chose to study and work there. In this environment, Shiite beliefs, practices, and rituals continued to develop and evolve, as they had in previous centuries.

While ‘Ashura rituals were more prevalent in areas where Shiites were concentrated, such as Lebanon, Iran, southern Iraq, Hyderabad, and Awadh, some Sunnis (especially those oriented more toward popular culture and Sufism) also commemorated Karbala in observances that were based on Shiite models. In some areas, such as South Asia, Sunnis have often been enthusiastic participants in Shiite rituals. In the modern era, the rituals of Sunnis and Shiites have become more distinct from each other. However, throughout much of Islamic history the differences between Sunnis and Shiites based on ideological constructs were often less prevalent. This was particularly true of popular practices, which could often be at variance with the views of the ulama.[16]

In summary, the rituals of ‘Ashura that are dominant in the world of Shiite Islam have been of three basic types. The first type of ritual is the sermon gathering, in which pious elegies are recited, usually including a combination of chants, elegies, story telling, and sermons. In these rituals, believers mourn the tragedy of ‘Ashura and learn ethical or spiritual lessons from the story. They also hope, through their mourning and commemoration, to become closer to the Imams and thereby to be drawn closer to God. The second type of ritual, which involves various forms of reenactment of the battle of Karbala, is a natural extension of the first and can include other actions, such as building or destroying various ritual objects, like a model of Husayn's tomb. The third type of ritual involves public physical mourning rituals, which typically involve self-mortification, often by slapping the chest and head or by hitting oneself with chains. In rare cases, blades are used to inflict more serious pain. Regional variations on such rituals can often be extremely diverse. The object is to inflict pain on oneself, without causing serious injury, because it is believed that pain allows the ritual participants to empathize with the martyrs by experiencing a small fraction of the pain they

experienced at Karbala. The willingness of the ritual participants to offer their bodies up for self-inflicted pain is also symbolic of their willingness to be martyred for Husayn. Self-inflicted punishment is also seen as an act of penance for the sins of the Muslim community, who abandoned Husayn and his followers to their tragic fate on the days leading up to ʻAshura.

In addition to the more spiritual or doctrinal functions of the rituals of ʻAshura, these rituals have also served a wide variety of other social and political functions. They have served to strengthen communal identities, especially in relation to Sunni Muslims, but also among ethnic, tribal, neighborhood, and other societal groups. They have helped to cement bonds between patrons and clients, especially in the premodern era. They have been used by modern political movements, including rulers, nationalists, reformists, rebels, and revolutionaries. They have served a wide variety of social functions, such as promoting and preserving social networks and enhancing the social status of individuals and groups, including governments and opposition groups. Many have even argued that ʻAshura rituals serve a variety of psychological or emotional functions for individuals. In short, the rituals of ʻAshura have served, and continue to serve, a dynamic function in Shiite societies. It is therefore reasonable to assume that they will continue to serve important spiritual, ethical, political, and social functions in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

Portions of this chapter are based on material from my two recently published books: *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shiʻi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2004) and *The Women of Karbala: The Gender Dynamics of Ritual Performances and Symbolic Discourses of Modern Shiʻi Islam* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005). Other material may be found in a forthcoming encyclopedia article, "Ashura" in *Encyclopedia of Islam Third Edition,* edited by Rudi Matthee and published by E.J. Brill in Leiden, The Netherlands. Please consult these publications for more detailed discussions of ʻAshura.

1. Early Muslim sources state that when the Prophet Muhammad and his followers emigrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE he instructed Muslims to fast on the 10th day of the month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. Within the next couple of years, after the month of Ramadan (the ninth month) was prescribed for Muslims as an obligatory period of fasting, the Muharram fast was transformed into an optional fast. There are numerous traditions that describe the events surrounding the adoption of ʻAshura as a holy day. All of these accounts agree that Muslims practiced the fast shortly after the emigration (*hijra*) to Medina and that they abandoned it upon the adoption of the fasting month of Ramadan. However, they disagree on the precise origins of the practice. Some say that Muhammad saw the Jews fasting on the 10th day of the first month of their calendar in commemoration of how God had saved the Israelites from the Egyptians. Other accounts stress the pre-Islamic Arab origins of the holy day, explaining that Muhammad's tribe of

Quraysh, and indeed Muhammad himself, used to fast on the day of ‘Ashura in the so-called “Period of Ignorance” (*Jahiliyya*) before the revelation of the Qur’an. Modern scholars have tended to favor the theory of the Jewish origins of the ‘Ashura fast, but there is no consensus on the issue. Given the scant historical sources that we have for this early period, scholars must rely on the interpretation of the Hadith and the few other sources that have survived. This is greatly complicated by the fact that the Hadith and other sources, such as the biographical texts about Muhammad (*Sira*), were not written down until one or two centuries after the events they describe. Therefore, it is difficult to resolve this debate definitively.

2. This hadith was reported by the famous Sunni traditionist Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) in his collection, *al-Musnad*. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985), 14.

3. Ibid., 17.

4. For a detailed discussion of the crisis of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, see Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

5. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari: Volume 16, The Community Divided,* trans. Adrian Brockett (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 52.

6. Muhammad Muhammadi Eshtehardi, *Hazrat Zaynab, payam risan-i shahidan-i Karbala* (Tehran: Nashr-i Mutahhar, 1997), 26–28.

7. This elegy was written by Sahib Ibn ‘Abbad, a prominent poet from the Buyid era (ca. 945–1055 CE). It comes from the collection by Abu Bakr al-Khwarazmi called *Maqtal al-Husayn* (The Killing of Husayn). See Mayel Baktash, “Ta‘ziyeh and its Philosophy,” in *Ta‘ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran,* ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York: New York University Press and Soroush Press, 1979), 97.

8. Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya* (Cairo: Matba‘a al-Sa‘ada, 1939). The translated passage is adapted from Michel M. Mazzaoui, “Shi‘ism and Ashura in South Lebanon,” in *Ta‘ziyeh,* 231.

9. For a modern edition of this work, see Mulla Husayn Va‘iz Kashifi, *Rawzat al-shuhada’* (Tehran: Chapkhanah-i Khavar, 1962).

10. The orators at *Rawza Khanis* are usually men, although sometimes, female orators give sermons in private *Rawza Khanis* attended exclusively by women.

11. Jean Calmard, “Le Patronage des Ta‘ziyeh: Elements pour une Etude globale,” in *Ta‘ziyeh,* 122.

12. For detailed discussions of the *Ta’ziyeh* traditions of Iran, please refer to the following books. In English, Peter J. Chelkowski, *Ta‘ziyeh* and Samuel Peterson, ed., *Ta‘ziyeh: Ritual and Popular Beliefs in Iran* (Hartford, Connecticut: Trinity College, 1988). In Persian, Sadiq Humayuni, *Ta‘ziyeh dar Iran* (Shiraz: Intisharat-i Navid, 1989); Inayatallah Shahidi and ‘Ali Bulukbashi, *Pazhuhishi dar ta‘ziyah va ta‘ziyah khani az aghaz ta payan-i dowrah-i Qajar dar Tihran* (Tehran: Daftar-i Pazhuhish-ha-i Farhangi, Iran UNESCO Commission, 2001); Jaber Anasari, ed., *Shabih khani, kuhan ulgu-i nimayishha-i Irani* (Tehran: Chapkhanah-i Ramin, 1992); Muhammad Ibrahim Ayati, *Barrisi-i tarikh-i Ashura,* 9th ed. (Tehran: Nashr-i Sadduq, 1996); and Laleh Taqiyan, *Ta‘ziyah va ti’atr dar Iran* (Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1995).

13. Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1993) 110.

14. Juan R.I. Cole, *The Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 22–27; see also, A.N. al-Naqvi, *A Historical Review of the Institution of Azadari for Imam Husain* (Karachi, Pakistan: Peer Mahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1974).

15. See Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism,* 22–35; Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); al-Naqvi, *Institution of Azadari.*

16. For Shi'i rituals outside Iran please refer to the following studies: Schubel, *Religious Performance;* Augustus Richard Norton, *Shi'ism and the Ashura Ritual in Lebanon* (New York: Al-Saqi Books, 2003); Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism;* Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Pinault, *The Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); David Pinault, *The Shi'ites, Ritual, and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Frederic Maatouk, *La representation de la mort de l'imam Hussein a Nabatieh* (Beirut: Université libanaise, Institut des sciences sociales, Centre de recherches, 1974); and Waddah Shararah, *Transformations d'une manifestation religieuse dans un village du Liban-Sud (Asura)* (Beirut: al-Jami'a al-Lubnaniyya, Ma'had al-'Ulum al-Ijtima'iyya, 1968).

11

The Hidden and the Most Hidden: The Heart as a Source of Spiritual Guidance

Shaykh ʿAli Jumʿa

Every Friday thousands of Muslims in Cairo hear the call to prayer and make their way to Sultan Hasan, a fourteenth-century mosque located in the heart of the old city, to pray and listen to the *khutba* (the Friday talk) of Shaykh ʿAli Jumʿa. As one enters the courtyard of the mosque, framed by four enormous vaulted halls, one is struck by the simplicity, beauty, and scale of the structure. It arouses the feeling of man and his Creator.

Shaykh ʿAli climbs the stairs to the *minbar,* faces the congregation, and begins his talk. He invokes the Name of Allah with such intensity that men weep, for it has been said that when you hear the Name of Allah you should weep, and if you do not weep, you should weep because you do not. After the prayer almost the entire congregation remains to hear the lesson that Shaykh ʿAli presents. As he speaks, his soft eyes penetrate, his voice rings with strength and quivers with emotion. He is the embodiment of intelligence and light.

It was after a Friday prayer on a hot Cairo evening that we spoke of the heart. This is the first time Shaykh ʿAli's words have been translated into English.

Shaykh ʿAli Jumʿa is now the *Mufti* (chief jurisconsult) of Egypt. At the time of this interview he was professor of Islamic jurisprudence at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt.

—Shems Friedlander

SHEMS FRIEDLANDER (SF): What is the heart? Where is it located? Is it the pump that physicians call a heart which remains with man between birth and death? Is it physical or metaphysical?

Shaykh ʿAli Jumʿa (SAJ): There are words, expressions in the Arabic language that speak about this level: the heart (*al-qalb*), the sensitive heart (*al-fu'ad*), the essence (*al-lubb*), and the intellect (*al-ʿaql*). The word *al-qalb* also refers to the physical entity, the pump that pumps

blood, the cessation of which separates life and death. But as to this other heart—meaning the inside of a thing, its truth, its central core, and its essence—there are five levels that Sufis speak about regarding this matter. They have spoken of the heart, the spirit, the secret, the hidden, and the most hidden. These five levels are like circles within circles, each circle higher and narrower than the one before. Meaning that if there are 1000 human beings at the level of the heart, at the level of the spirit there are eight hundred, at the level of the secret six hundred, the hidden two hundred, at the level of the most hidden one hundred—and what is beyond this fewer than one hundred. These levels form a pyramidal shape. The heart is a level among the levels, and not a piece of flesh. But there is a relation of sorts between the heart as a piece of flesh and the heart as a level. This relation is not perceived or sensed. It is not possible to touch, see, or experience it through the five senses. And yet, we feel the level of the heart near the breast, below it, and to the left. We feel it in a place lower than or under the part of the body that is the physical heart.

SF: How does one enter this heart?

SAJ: The way leading to the heart is remembrance, repetition of the Names of Allah (*dhikr*) and contemplation (*fikr*). Just as a human being feels that thinking takes place in the head (*Shaykh ʿAli places his hand on his head*) and does not feel that his hand is thinking, so he feels near the heart the unveiling of the secrets and lights in the five realms. There are five realms which the human being experiences. The world of *al-mulk*, this is the visible world experienced by the five senses; the world of *al-malakut,* this comprises the creatures and creation that man cannot see and cannot arrive at through his five senses, like the angels, *jinn*, hell, and heaven. Together, *al-mulk* and *al-malakut* are the world, which is what is other than Allah. Beyond this are three worlds at the divine level; the world of beauty, the world of majesty, and that of completeness. They are also referred to as "what is above the throne" and is what is meant by His saying "*Al-Rahman ala'l-arsh istawa*." What is above the throne is Allah in His Beauty, Completeness, and Splendor. What is beneath the throne is what is referred to as the carpet. There is a throne and there is a carpet. The aforementioned five levels—the heart, the spirit, the secret, the hidden, and the most hidden—are levels among the levels of lights and secrets in the world of *mulk* and *malakut,* the world beneath the throne, and through which man ascends to the positions of the throne. Above the throne there are five other levels—heart, spirit, secret, hidden, and most hidden—resembling these five, reflected like a mirror, five facing this way and five that way (*Shaykh ʿAli demonstrates with his open palms, one palm toward the*

listener, one palm toward himself). Beyond this are three other worlds which are totally obscure, meaning that we absolutely cannot comprehend them, whether with our thought, our minds, our practice of *dhikr,* or our sensory perception. For Allah in His Glory is beyond comprehension.

SF: And so what is the heart?

SAJ: The heart is a level among the levels of piety on the way to Allah, the lights and secrets of which are manifested in a part of the body, the form of which is a pump that pumps blood in the body. In this area, not in the part of the body itself but around it, man feels something of the revelation of secrets, disclosures, and lights.

SF: Where is the heart?

SAJ: It is in man. It is a level among levels of the spirit, meaning a circle of the circles of the spirit. Above it is also the sprit; it is a level in which the spirit finds and comprehends itself. And then there is what is secret. At this level man understands that he is nothing and that Allah is the foundation of all things. In this stage man might lose his way and believe himself to be Allah, and believe himself to be nothing because Allah has totally taken him over and therefore is him. After this he ascends to the hidden and knows that he is one thing and Allah is another. That he is mortal and Allah is permanent and that there is a difference between the creature and the Creator. Then he is elevated beyond this and knows that he is a manifestation among the manifestations of the Beneficent, and that the attributes of Allah are all reflected in him through ability, will, and knowledge. This is the station of the most hidden. The first of all these endless levels is the heart, the instrument of contemplation (*fikr*) and *dhikr* (remembrance by repetition). Allah is eternal, but I perish. I have a beginning and He has no beginning. I need Him but He does not need me, and so a feeling comes from my heart. This is the station of the hidden.

SF: Does the heart have thoughts? Does it have emotions, feelings? Is the spirit, as the philosopher and mystic al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) says, a subtle body originating in the cavity of the physical heart, which spreads through the body via the arteries, just as a light from a lantern fills a room?

SAJ: The hidden which we have talked about is a level of the levels that reside in the heart. This heart is a container, a vessel, and these levels of which the first is also called the heart are another thing. Then

there is the spirit, the secret, the hidden, and the most hidden—all reside in the heart as a vessel. For the spiritual world has a connection to the physical world, but in reality this material which includes heart, spirit, secret, hidden, and most hidden is composed of gradations of the spirit. It is not the pump, but its locus is the pump, just as water is contained in a glass. The pump is the locus of the spiritual of which al-Ghazali speaks. So the question is: Does this spiritual entity which is inside the pump have emotions, feelings? Yes, it has emotions. These emotions have been the subject of Sufi thinking and are seen as ten levels. These emotions include a feeling called repentance, which is when man feels the need to turn away from what is not Allah, as if his preoccupation with the universe is a sin on his part from which he wants to turn away, an ugly feeling.There are ten stations and a section called states. A station is an unchangeable emotion, and the states are passing emotions that come and go. Man ascends from one station to the next and does not return to a lower station. If a man does return to a lower station, it is a major catastrophe, like returning from faith to unbelief. The states come and go. The Sufis have given them names such as depressed, happy, union, and separation. The reply then to this question is: The spiritual heart does have emotions and these emotions are of two kinds, unmovable and passing.

SF: What closes the heart?

SAJ: According to the Sufis the heart has two doors: a door to creation, and a door to Truth, therefore to Allah. There is also what is earned and what is given. By his nature man's heart is open to creation. He needs food, drink, clothing, a dwelling place, a companion, company, and he needs to live in the world according to its laws. This is the door of creation. It is in the nature of man that this door be open. When *dhikr* is achieved, it opens the other door, the door of Truth, and this happens in three stages. In the first, the door of Truth is closed. In the second, it opens, but the door of creation closes from the intensity of *dhikr,* as if *dhikr* is a wind closing the door of creation and opening the door of Truth. In the third, the door of creation also opens, and the heart has two open doors. The fourth case is when both doors are closed and this is what is called madness. This is someone who is neither into worship nor into the world—that is, he knows nothing at all. He has exited from the circle of responsibility. As to the first case—wherein the door of creation is opened, blocking the door to Truth—that is from lack of *dhikr* and from man's nature. So what opens and what closes? This is the answer. The door of creation opens naturally, and the door of Truth is opened by *dhikr* and *fikr*. The door of Truth opens little by little until it is wide open. An important issue

to bring up here is that of what is earned and what is given. We can open the door through *dhikr*, but the door can also be opened by Allah without *dhikr*. The Sufis speak of a person who is a seeker and another who is sought. There is one who is on the way and one who is attracted. All these terms lead to the same meaning, namely that there is something man can do that leads to his heart being opened, and there is also a gift from Allah that opens the heart and has nothing to do with the person's effort. The Prophet used to say: "*Allahumma,* let there be in my heart light, and in my hearing light, and in my seeing light, in my hands light, to my right light, to my left light, and let me be light."

SF: Moses threw the staff and it became a snake. He was commanded to pick up the snake. He did and it again became a staff. Then he was told to place his hand on his heart. When he removed it the Name of Allah was written in light on the palm of his hand. Can metaphysical light be transformed into light perceived by the senses?

SAJ: All spiritual things can be transformed into things of a sensory nature. On the Day of Judgment death comes in the form of a ram. Death here is a concept but it becomes materialized. There are two kinds of secrets and two kinds of lights. We spoke of the realm of *al-mulk* and the realm of *al-malakut,* circles of the creation. In each there are secrets and lights. The secrets of *al-mulk* are of the senses. Meaning the benefits of medicinal plants and the laws of building and engineering, of mathematics, and of hydrology—all these are secrets that man discovers every day in the realm of *al-mulk*. There are also sensory lights: electricity, the sun, moon, stars, lasers, and so on. There are also lights and secrets of *al-malakut*—lights and secrets that are nonsensory. But anything from the realm of *al-malakut* can enter the realm of *mulk,* can be transformed into something perceived by the senses. Creation is composed of two sections: *al-mulk,* which is perceived by the five senses, and *al-malakut*. That realm which may be sensed by the five senses is what we are in now. In *al-malakut* it is the spirit ascending the circles which is the perceiver and not the senses.

SF: There is a saying of the Prophet Muhammad: "All things have a polish. The polish of the heart is the Remembrance of God." What rusts the heart?

SAJ: In the Qur'an there are descriptions of what ails the heart. There is the layer of scum on stagnant water, the cover, the locks, veils, pride, and so on, many qualities. These qualities can be removed through faith, others by repetition of the Names of Allah, and others by contemplation. The Sufis link this to the seven levels of the self (*al-nafs*):

domineering, censorious, inspiring, tranquil, contented, pleasing, and pure. They have linked these to the Beautiful Names of Allah and to the gradations of man's attempt to remove rust or scum. Seven Names used are as follows: *la illah illa Allah, Allah, Hu, Al-Hayy, Al-Qayyum, Al-Haqq,* and *Al-Qahhar*. There is some disagreement about this as some Sufis choose *Al-Aziz, Al-Wahid, Al-Wadud, Al-Wahab, Al-Basit,* and *Al-Muhaymin*. There are various formulas given by a sheikh as to the manner and frequency of the repetition of the Names. The invocation of the Names of Allah satisfies the heart and opens the door of Truth.

NOTE

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12

Evil as the Absence of the Good

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Currently University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is one of the foremost scholars and writers on Islam and Sufism in the world today. Gray Henry (Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore) directs Fons Vitae, which publishes books on world spirituality and works with the Thomas Merton Foundation in Louisville, Kentucky.

GRAY HENRY (GH): First is the question of defining evil. Is there absolute evil, and is there relative evil?

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR (SHN): From the metaphysical point of view, the world itself is a revelation. Revelation is not only the sacred book or an avatar or a divine descent. The universe itself is the primal revelation of God. But it is also a veiling. Only the supreme Good, which is absolute, can be absolutely good. All that is not in that supreme Reality must participate in and partake of the separation from that supreme Good. That's why Christ said, ''Only my father in heaven is good.'' Even Christ said that he was not ''the Good;'' only his father in heaven was so. Now, this separation from the Good is necessary because we exist. To exist is to be separated from the supreme Reality, to be in the domain of relativity. Separation is the origin of all that we call evil. In *The Divine Comedy,* Dante Alighieri says that Hell is separation from God. God is real; we are relatively real. To the extent that we are relatively real, we are separated from the Divine Reality by a hiatus which itself is the origin of what appears to us to be evil. To the extent that we are real, we reflect the good. That is also why the good has an ontological basis; evil does not.

GH: This is the important point.

SHN: Exactly. Evil is like shadow; the good is like the sun, like light. Now, when you sit under the shade of a tree, you say, ''I feel cool.''

You think that the shade and the sun ten feet away are equal existentially. Both exist. If you go in the sun, you're hot; if you're under the shade, you're cool. But actually the shade is the absence of the sun. It doesn't have the same ontological status. In the same way, evil is real as much as we, who are relative beings, are real, but it is not real as far as "The Real" is concerned. That is, in God there is no evil. Then why, you might ask, did God bother to create the world? There is the Hindu doctrine of *lila*—the world is divine play. The Islamic response, I think, is most to the point when it asserts that God wanted to be known and therefore created the world so that he would be known. God is infinite. Infinity implies all possibilities, including the possibility of the negation of itself. God is also good. It's in the nature of good to give of itself, as Saint Augustine said, like the light, like the sun. The sun cannot but give of itself. When you understand these two supreme attributes of God, you understand that the possibility of divine self-negation must become realized. And that is the world.

GH: A lot of people say evil is a real force. Does it have its own life?

SHN: That's a very important issue. As you descend down the plane of reality, the veils of darkness increase until you reach the world in which we are, in which the veil is very thick. As the history of the world flows, gradually there's a movement away from the Source, from the Principle. That is, God is not only the center and the above, He's also the beginning and the origin. He's the alpha. In the original creation there were higher levels of reality, closer to the sun. Light dominated completely over darkness. That's the Golden Age, the *Kritayuga* in Hinduism, and so forth. But as the history of the cosmos and our history unfold, the darkness becomes more and more accentuated. This flow, however, is interrupted by revelation and by divine descents throughout human history, each a foundation of a great religion: Christ, Muhammad the Prophet of Islam, the Buddha, Moses on Mt. Sinai, Zoroaster, Lao Tse, and Confucius. There's an intense glow which defines the beginning of each religion, but then the cycle of degeneration begins again.

GH: Now, at the end of the twentieth century, we have the drying up of traditional forms of life.

SHN: Actually, the twentieth century has seen more horrendous forms of evil than any period of human history.

GH: It would appear so.

SHN: There are many people who criticize Traditionalists by saying, "Oh, you idealize the old world. There were also wars in ancient times," and things like that. Of course we do not deny it. But there is a great degree of difference between historical events and events today. And as the cosmic cycle unfolds, and as truths are forgotten, then for a while evil is not even recognized as such. People refuse to recognize it, and it becomes all-invading. This raises an important point of the question you asked a moment ago: Is evil a force? Now, from the *metaphysical* point of view, only God is real. *Evil has no ultimate reality.* Since we live on the level of *relativity,* in our ordinary consciousness this world is relatively real. *Evil is also relatively real.* All religions speak of the battle of good and evil. It would be a great mistake to say, "Well, there is no evil in or around me." In fact, evil is as real as the ego.

GH: Which is separative.

SHN: Yes. We assert the separative ego while denying evil—one of the great strategies of the modern world.

GH: That's a contradiction.

SHN: Absolute contradiction. People don't talk about the devil any more in polite society. Not fashionable. But the devil is the personification of the separative tendency on the human plane. To deny the devil is to deny God. Charles Baudelaire says that in *The Flowers of Evil.* A pasteurized world in which there is no evil and no devil is itself the worst kind of daydreaming and something demonic in the ultimate sense. We must understand that destiny has put us in a moment of cosmic history in which there is a predominance of evil, and we are here to be, in fact, testament and witness to the good. In older days there were so many ways of controlling evil, through religious rites, spiritual disciplines and teachers, through the presence of the sacred. . .today it's so difficult. And that is the secret of why, in the traditional sources, there are sometimes indications that people prayed for those who would live at the end of the world.

GH: Then the ego is where the force of evil takes place in the human world. And can there be evil without intention?

SHN: In the animal or the plant world—

GH: When there are hurricanes that kill people and so forth.

SHN: That is not completely evil, because a hurricane also cleans up the air and so forth and reestablishes balance. What is metaphysically

''evil'' is the gradual flow of the cosmos away from its original perfection when it was much more transparent to the archetypal realities. Nature, precisely because it does not have a will to act, is always innocent. Therefore there is no moral evil in nature. Pollution, the greenhouse effect, and the destruction of the coral reefs and the ecology of the oceans: it is we who are destroying nature. Is this only evil if we will it? Morally, yes. The reason we are doing this, and not, let's say, elephants or crocodiles, is precisely because God has given us free will. In the divine plan of things, it is the crown of creation that will finally destroy creation, bring the *Kaliyuga* to an end. Which is what we're doing.

GH: Many people ask, If God is really good, how can he create sinners and then send them to Hell?—a question of predestination and free will.

SHN: Yes, this is important. If everything is determined by God, and we have no free will, then we cannot commit evil. Everything we do is God's will. However, the other side is the question of free will. There can be no moral responsibility without free will. Evil can only be committed if you are free to commit evil. That is why, for example, if you have a fever, that is not an act of evil committed on your part. If you deliberately take a drug which is bad for your body, then you have committed an evil act. But if you eat an apple with something bad for you inside it without knowing it—if you do it without intention—then it's not evil. So evil is always related to intention. As to whether God created sinners deliberately to commit sins and go to Hell, that is not true at all, because those sinners had free will. They were not chosen just to be sinners and sent to hell—that would be a monstrous view of God. Every person has the free will to choose. That is why, for example, in both Islam and Christianity, children or insane people are absolved from committing evil. So the question of intention, free will, and responsibility are part and parcel of reality. You might well say, however, we're put in this world where there's so much evil. Somebody has to commit this evil. So that means most of us have to commit evil. Isn't that unfair? Here I will quote you the famous saying of Christ: ''Trouble must needs come, but woe unto him who bringeth it about.'' Tragedy will come, but woe unto you if you cause its coming. That does not take away our responsibility before God. Each individual, by virtue of the fact that he or she is given the freedom to act, has a moral responsibility. Nobody's forced to become a sinner. We always have the freedom to come out of that state. If you have committed sin, it's always possible, as long as you're human, to eradicate evil by virtue of being human. It's a remarkable gift

which God has given us. We can always ask God's pardon, God's mercy.

GH: I have a question about the terms "evil" and "bad." Sometimes things happen and we call them "bad" in our lives—an illness or something. They can be transformed spiritually by us into the good. But can something that seems "evil" be transformed? What is the relationship between "evil" and "bad"?

SHN: Oftentimes events befall us which cause us to suffer. Those are opportunities for the soul to grow. We are in this world, as the Koran says, to be tested. "Evil," however, that which is morally evil, is not only bad in the sense that it's bad for us, but it has no redemptive quality to it unless you recognize it as evil, and perform the *tawba* (turning), and the purging aspect which that brings about. An evil that can befall us can be good for us only in that sense.

GH: *Metanoia.*

SHN: That's right—an occasion for *tawba,* for repentance, for purging something from us by recognizing it as evil. It can also be a challenge for transformation, which is quite something else.

GH: Sometimes people say when a child is born deformed or falls ill, it's a sign of evil. How can we understand that?

SHN: Because of the separation between the material world and the intelligible world, you can never have the perfection of the spiritual world in this one. If you draw a pattern of a hexagon, the perfect hexagon exists only in the intelligible, the mathematical world. Every hexagon that you make is imperfect. It's remarkable how the good predominates over evil. But the imperfection has to be there. We expect everything to be good, everything to be perfect. We want everything without giving anything. We don't want to submit ourselves to God. We do not want to accept our destiny. We always want to assert ourselves as individual egos. And then we expect everything to be perfect. And when it isn't, we—who did not start with truly believing that God is reality and whatever good He has given us we must be thankful for—then begin to criticize God and religion: Oh, if this is a good God, why am I having troubles? But traditional people realized there were imperfections in this world. They took it as a part of terrestrial life and never expected perfection here below. Now, the fact that we are so dissatisfied is proof of our divine origin. Why is it that we expect perfection? That comes from the imprint of the divinity upon us.

GH: Does evil exist cross-culturally? Do, for example, the Buddhists see evil the same way that Muslims do?

SHN: The spiritual and metaphysical significance of evil is universal. It has to do with the ego, with the walls that we draw around it, with the importance of breaking that wall, and with giving of ourselves. However, the forms in which acts take place in which good and evil are defined are bound by the traditions in which human beings live. Then there are formal differences which the various revelations impose as far as what actions are performed. For example, for a Muslim it is considered to be *haram* (forbidden), an evil act, to drink alcoholic beverages or to eat pork. A Jew who follows the *halakhah* will also not eat pork. Whereas for a Christian this is not the case. One might say, "Well, isn't this making evil relative?" But that's to misunderstand the fact that each religion sacralizes the pattern of life according to its own principles.

GH: Is the way we personally overcome evil in ourselves the purification of the ego?

SHN: Yes, but that cannot just be done personally, because who is the person doing the purifying if the ego itself is not purified? That is why you need tradition and objective revelation from the source of All Good. It's important to mention that there is a reality to the human state before what Christianity calls the fallen state of Original Sin. That is what we call in Islam the *fitra* or primordial nature, which was molded in the good and with the good. And that always remains.
We have separated ourselves from our primordial nature. The outer human has forgotten the inner. But always, deep in ourselves, we have the sense of goodness and know what is evil in the deepest moral sense. But we have to delve deeply into ourselves, which many of us do not do. That is why revelation is indispensable.

GH: Every moment, we say, "I should do that, I shouldn't do that." There must be a final accountability because we are in fact continually taking account of ourselves.

SHN: Of course. That tendency, that impulse is still within us. But it's stronger in some people and weaker in others. Unless a society has the objective framework of morality, it cannot survive on this impulse alone.

GH: In the Qur'an, God punishes the mighty who do evil. Why do monstrous heads of state, for example, go seemingly unpunished today?

SHN: That's a question that people often pose, not only about the mighty, but about people who have committed evil and who seem to be living a fairly comfortable life. And some people who've done much good suffer a great deal. The answer, of course, is that we have developed a truncated vision of both divine reality and our own reality, because we associate all of life with only this life. We associate divine justice with our own assessment of it. An evil person may seem to be living a very comfortable life, but he will be punished in the larger curve of life. One has to understand, especially in the case of human beings, that we have a very long journey from our origination in God to our return to the Divine. Our earthly life is only a small part of this circle. To judge things only by the little bit of this trajectory that we are able to observe is false. What appears outwardly as good is not necessarily so inwardly. There are people who seem to have a very comfortable life and live in beautiful surroundings, but who live in hell within themselves.

GH: Can evil, in the end, be overcome? In terms of our own self, that is?

SHN: Evil can *always* be overcome within ourselves. We live in this world in order to do that. We are not in this world to eradicate evil in the whole of the world. This is one of the false ideas that many people have. Outside of us, we must do as much as we can. But our main responsibility is, first of all, to our soul, to God—to cleanse ourselves. One of the great errors of modern society is that by the inversion of all values, people want to eradicate evil in the world without having purified themselves. And so this impulse within the soul for perfection and goodness skips over that which is most difficult—the correcting of ourselves. It is much easier to feed the hungry in India than to fast oneself.

GH: Does evil have an inherent attraction to some people? What would there be in a human being that would attract it to evil?

SHN: Although we were created in the perfect mold, we are also cast into this world and given the possibility of being the lowest of the low. There is within the world a tendency toward what Islam calls forgetfulness of Divine reality; Christianity calls it Original Sin. Although God created us in goodness, we have fallen from that state. There is in fact a tendency in the soul toward falling down. It's what the Hindus call the *tamasic* tendency. Water flows downward. If you let a stone go, it falls down. It takes effort to push something up. God has put us in this world in such a way that He has given us the will,

but because He loves us and love needs effort, He wants us to use this effort to move upward.

GH: Is there a difference between evil in thought and evil in deed?

SHN: Yes. We cannot perform an evil deed without having the thought that goes with it. That is the intention. God judges our deeds according to our intentions. Let's say we walk in the street and suddenly step on an animal and hurt it. Or if we're driving, hit a tree, and a bird falls down and dies—we have not premeditated this performance of an evil deed. That is not evil. It's unfortunate, and we have to ask God's pardon that we were the instrument for such a thing, but it is not an evil deed in the theological and moral sense of the term. Every deed is preceded by thought. An evil thought is more dangerous than an evil deed, because it is the source of evil deeds. Society can only judge by the deeds, but evil thoughts are punished by God.

GH: What if one just pops into your head?

SHN: That's temptation. Evil thoughts are evil thoughts when they become *our* thoughts, when we hold them.

GH: One last question. What is a simple thought an average person can hold onto when dealing with questions concerning evil?

SHN: The simplest thought is that God, being good, has created a world in which there is a remarkable predominance of the good over evil, of the beautiful over the ugly, and that no matter what situation we encounter in life, we always have access to the good and the beautiful. It's for us to take advantage of being human and to make this choice of the good over that which is evil, which is ultimately both ugly and a negation.

NOTE

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13

The Blessed State of Fear: Reflections from Islam and Christianity

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

There is only one Real Fear: that we do not fully avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded by the human state and that at the moment of death we are not content with the state or degree of spiritual integrity we have realized. Once we are separated from our bodies, our vehicles of ''doing'' and change, we are left with who we *are*. Even knowing this, we go along abusing the human state.

In the various spiritual traditions, fear and its related attitudes of contrition and repentance can be seen as the blessed impetus and key for the commencement of the spiritual life. Fear incites the soul to move forward. In Islamic mysticism, the movement of the soul toward its true nature is described in three stages: the first is called *makhafa* or Fear of God; the second is called *mahabba*, which refers to the Love of God; and the third stage is *ma'rifa,* which means Gnosis or Knowledge of God. According to Martin Lings, each of these stages has two aspects: ''The domain of fear-action is that of 'must not' and 'must'; love has likewise, in addition to its dynamic intensity, the static aspect of contemplative bliss; and spiritual knowledge is both objective and subjective being ultimately concerned with the Absolute as Transcendent Truth and Immanent Selfhood. . . . Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it is to fear that the first two stations are related. They are thus concerned with danger, and they are two because danger confronts man with two possibilities, flight or attack, that is, abstention and accomplishment. The aforementioned six stations of wisdom might be called dimensions of holiness.''[1]

According to Lings, these same three principles of Fear, Love, and Knowledge are apparent in Islamic art and in Qur'anic illumination. The majority of calligraphers were Sufis who had a great fear of intruding on the perfection of the Qur'an with their art. In Islamic art, the geometric aspect of design corresponds with the principles of Rigor and Fear. The arabesque or endlessly entwining plant tendrils represent Love.

Finally, the calligraphy of the Revealed Word corresponds to the domain of Knowledge.

Frithjof Schuon has explained, "Every spiritual path must start with a 'conversion,' an apparently negative turning round of the will, an indirect movement towards God in the form of an inner separation from the false plenitude of the world. This withdrawal corresponds to the station of renunciation or detachment, of sobriety, of fear of God: what has to be overcome is desire, passional attachment, and idolatry of ephemeral things."[2]

The Sufi use of prayer beads or "rosary" (Ar. *tasbih*) can be compared to the Catholic rite of Holy Communion. Both begin with the attitudes of fear and repentance—an emptying of oneself from one's Self. When reciting prayers on the *tasbih,* a Muslim repeats 99 times, "God forgive me." This is said with the intention of *tawba*—Repentance or "turning"—that is, of sincerely desiring to change. The Catholic, before approaching the altar to receive the sacrament, prays, "Lord have mercy upon me, Christ have mercy upon me."[3] Both Muslims and Catholic Christians thus participate in an emptying—a death of all that is unholy or low in themselves. This is the stage that might be referred to as the "death" that St. John of the Cross described when he said, "Die before you die." However, after death comes resurrection, and in the third stage comes eternal life. After the act of emptying comes reformation; according to Meister Eckhart, this leads ultimately to Union with the Godhead: "When I preach, I usually speak of disinterest and say that a man should be *empty* of self and all things; and secondly, that he should be *reconstructed* in the simple Good that God is; and thirdly, that he should consider the great aristocracy which God has set up in the soul, such that by means of it man may wonderfully *attain to God*; and fourthly, of *the purity of the divine nature.*"

In the second stage of prayer with the *tasbih* the Muslim asks for God's blessing and praise upon the Prophet Muhammad with the idea that he himself may return to his own pure and primordial nature, the *fitra,* the condition of the True Man. The Christian, as he kneels before the altar now empty, waits to receive the bread and wine, whether understood symbolically or literally to be the presence of the Word of God. When the Host is taken within his own emptiness he thereby regains his Christ-like nature. He has been *re*-formed for that moment in the Self, which he hopes he will have realized for the time of his resurrection.

The third stage of spiritual movement initiated by fear is that of union or return to the Divine Source of all Being—the froth subsiding into the sea from which it has been manifested. One hopes that if purity of soul has not been realized, if one has not awakened to one's true state of being, God will bestow His Grace and Mercy for the intention of sincere effort in God's direction.

The Muslim in the final stage of prayer with the *tasbih* repeats 99 times, "There is no god but God" (*la ilaha illa Allah*), thereby attesting to the

absence of anything but God. Neither the vessel full of itself nor the empty vessel filled with True Man survives; both have returned to the One. A painting by Raphael found at the Vatican provides a similar image for the Christian. In this painting it is as if we are before an altar upon which stands a chalice, and above the chalice appears the dove of the Holy Spirit. At the top of the painting is a depiction of God in the company of heavenly personages including Mary, Jesus, John the Baptist, the Apostles, and angels. What we may understand from this scene is that after the worshipper has received the sacrament and kneels purified before the altar, his or her soul rises up through the medium of the Holy Spirit and back to God. This is a very powerful rite to experience. Also, it reminds the believer on a weekly or more frequent basis of the method of salvation and outcome that one desires for one's human life. By performing these rites, one practices death, resurrection, and eternal life, hoping that during the human state one purifies one's being and in the end will return directly to the Maker.

So just as fear is the blessed beginning, we must never forget its positive nature. Spiritual attainment has frequently been described in the terminology of the alchemical tradition whereby man's leaden, dull nature is returned to its golden original state. When any substance or entity (even a relationship) undergoes dissolution, it must eventually be recrystallized in a new form. In other words, the new entity has the possibility of being reconstituted in a higher and nobler state. What this means for any of us is that when we experience fear, when things seem to be coming apart, we should instead be joyful and grateful for the possibility of moving upward from our present plateau where we perhaps are too comfortably established.

According to Titus Burckhardt, "Lead represents the chaotic, 'heavy,' and sick condition of metal or of the inward man, while gold—'congealed light' and 'earthly sun'—expresses the perfection of both metallic and human existence." He goes on to explain that the *re*-formation of the soul cannot take place until it is "freed from all the rigidities and inner contradictions (so that it may) become that plastic substance on which the Sprit or Intellect, coming from on high, can imprint a new 'form'—a form which does not limit or bind, but on the contrary delivers, because it comes from the Divine Essence.... The soul cannot be transmuted without the cooperation of Spirit, and the Spirit illumines the soul only to the extent of its passive preparedness and in accordance with its manners."[4]

Thus, as the purpose of the human state of being is the sanctification of one's soul, and as one would desire to achieve this before death, I would like to conclude with an extraordinary description of the Saint who no longer fears—although this was the blessed state by which his spiritual life commenced: "The Saint hath no fear, because fear is the expectation either of some future calamity or of the eventual loss of some object of desire; whereas the Saint is the 'son of his time' (resides in the Eternal Present/Presence); he has no future from which he should fear anything and, as he hath no fear so

he hath no hope since hope is the expectation either of gaining an object of desire or of being relieved from a misfortune, and this belongs to the future; not does he grieve because grief arises from the rigor of time, and how should he feel grief who dwells in the Radiance of Satisfaction and the Garden of Concord."[5]

NOTES

This chapter first appeared in *Parabola,* fall 1998, 54–57. It is reproduced with slight modifications in this volume with the permission of the editors of *Parabola.*

1. Martin Lings, *Symbol & Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence* (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1991), 114–115.

2. Frithjof Schuon, *Stations of Wisdom* (Bloomington, Indiana: Perennial Books, 1980), 147.

3. "Where reverence is, there too is fear." See Plato, *Euthypho,* 12b.

4. Titus Burkhardt, *Alchemy, Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1997), 24, 97, 111.

5. A statement attributed to the great Sufi Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910 CE).

14

Thomas Merton and a Sufi Saint

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

One of the volumes to be found in Merton's personal library is titled *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century* by Martin Lings.[1] It is heavily underlined throughout. Often in the margins, Merton marked material with several bold vertical lines or with asterisks next to the text. As these highlighted passages must represent what Merton felt best elucidated Islamic mysticism, or were ideas he may have agreed with or found to be useful for his own spiritual growth or understanding, a small selection of these are presented here in order to illustrate some of the concepts and ideas to which Merton was attracted. At the same time, it is hoped that this selection will further inform the reader about the nature and depth of Sufism.

Martin Lings, formerly Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts in the British Museum and the British Library, and author of many important works on Islam and Sufism, opens this wonderful volume with a chapter "Seen from Outside," which presents the impressions of Dr. Marcel Carret, who tended the Algerian saint Ahmad al-'Alawi (1869–1934) in his final years. Dr. Carret's initial impression of Shaikh al-'Alawi is as follows:

> The first thing that struck me was his likeness to the usual representation of Christ. His clothes, so nearly if not exactly the same as those which Jesus must have worn, the fine lawn head-cloth which framed his face, his whole attitude—everything conspired to reinforce the likeness. It occurred to me that such must have been the appearance of Christ when he received his disciples at the time when he was staying with Martha and Mary.

Dr. Carret later recalled:

> Fairly often while I was talking quietly with the Shaikh, the Name Allah had come to us from some remote corner of the *zâwiyah,* uttered on one long drawn out vibrant note:
>
> "A. . .l. . .la. . .h!"

> It was like a cry of despair, a distraught supplication, and it came from some solitary cell-bound disciple, bent on meditation. The cry was usually repeated several times, and then all was silence once more.
>
> "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord."
>
> "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."
>
> These verses from the Psalms came to my mind. The supplication was really just the same, the supreme cry to God of a soul in distress.
>
> I was not wrong, for later, when I asked the Shaikh what was the meaning of the cry which we had just heard, he answered:
>
> "It is a disciple asking God to help him in his meditation."
>
> "May I ask what is the purpose of his meditation?"
>
> "To achieve self-realization in God."
>
> "Do all the disciples succeed in doing this?"
>
> "No, it is seldom that anyone does. It is only possible for a very few."
>
> "Then what happens to those who do not? Are they not desperate?"
>
> "No: they always rise high enough to have at least inward Peace."
>
> Inward Peace. That was the point he came back to most often, and there lay, no doubt, the reason for his great influence. For what man does not aspire, in some way or other, to inward Peace?

In the chapter "The Reality of Sufism," found in "Part One: The Path and the Order," Merton marked lines to do with spiritual aspiration. For the most part, the passages he noted (indented below) are the exact words of the saint himself. Often Shaikh al-'Alawi cites passages from the Qur'an, hadith—or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad—and from the writings of many of Islam's great saints and mystics of previous centuries. Dr. Lings, for the most part "allows the Sufis. . .to speak for themselves in a series of texts mainly translated from the Arabic."

> The aspiration "to let one's Spirit (that is, as here meant, one's centre of consciousness) rise above oneself" presupposes at the very least some remote awareness of the existence of the Heart, which is the point where the human self ends and the Transcendent Self begins. If the clouds in the night of the soul are so thick as to prevent the moon of the Heart from showing the slightest sign of its presence, there can be no such aspiration. (40)

In a hadith (saying of the Prophet), God states:

> "My slave ceaseth not to draw nigh unto Me with devotions of his free will until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth, and the Sight wherewith he seeth, and the Hand wherewith he smiteth, and the Foot wherewith on he walketh." (Bukhari) (37)
>
> The Qur'an insists without respite on remembrance of God, *dhikr Allah,* and this insistence holds the place in Islam that is held in Christianity by the first of Christ's two commandments. It is the Quranic use of the cognitive term

"remembrance" rather than "love" which has, perhaps more than anything else, imposed on Islamic mysticism its special characteristics. (45)

Many passages which interested Merton seemed to validate the aims and nature of monastic life. The first of many such passages marked by Merton are lines from the early eighth-century saint Hasan al-Basri:

"He that knoweth God loveth Him, and he that knoweth the world abstaineth from it," and the saying of another early Sufi: "Intimacy (*uns*) with God is finer and sweeter than longing." (46)

From "The Spiritual Master," there is more on what would have appealed to a monk who made a hermitage in the forest, as did Merton, in the following paragraphs, which Merton marked, some written by Dr. Lings and some directly quoting Shaikh al-'Alawi.

One of his motives for taking this step [for adding his own name 'Alawî to distinguish his particular branch of the Darqâwî tarîqah] was that he felt the need to introduce, as part of his method, the practice of *khalwah,* that is, spiritual retreat in the solitude of an isolated cell or small hermitage. There was nothing very drastic in this, for if remembrance of God be the positive or heavenly aspect of all mysticism, its negative or earthly aspect is retreat or drawing away from other than God. The Tradition "Be in this world as a stranger, or as a passer-by" has already been quoted, and one of the most powerful aids to achieving this permanent inward spiritual retreat is bodily withdrawal which, in some form or another, perpetual or temporary, is a feature of almost all contemplative orders. In some Sufic brotherhoods—the Khalwatî Tarîqah, for example—it was tradition to make retreat in a special hermitage. But in the Shâdhilî Tarîqah and its branches, the spiritual retreat had usually taken the form of withdrawal to the solitudes of nature, after the pattern of the Prophet's retreats in the cave on Mount Hira, and though inevitably the *khalwah* must have been used on some occasion, to introduce it as a regular methodic practice was something of an innovation for the descendants of Abû 'l-Hasan ash-Shâdhilî. However, the Shaikh no doubt found this form of retreat more practicable than any other in view of the conditions in which most of his disciples lived. We have already seen that he himself had suffered for want of a definite place where he could be alone, and that it was part of his method to supervise at times very closely the invocation of his disciples, which presupposed that the disciple in question would be within easy reach of him.

'Abd al-Karîm Jossot quotes the Shaikh as having said to him:

"The *khalwah* is a cell in which I put a novice after he has sworn to me not to leave it for forty days if need be. In this oratory he must do nothing but repeat ceaselessly, day and night, the Divine Name (Allah), drawing out at each invocation the syllable *âh* until he has no more breath left...."

"During the *khalwah* he fasts strictly by day, only breaking his fast between sunset and dawn.... Some *fuqarâ*[2] obtain the sudden illumination after a few

minutes, some only after several days, and some only after several weeks. I know one *faqîr* who waited eight months. Each morning he would say to me: 'My heart is still too hard,' and would continue his *khalwah*. In the end his efforts were rewarded." (84–85)

It interested Merton that the spiritual retreat demanded by the Shaikh al-'Alawi for his disciples was very difficult for most to endure:

But what might have been intolerable in other circumstances was made relatively easy because the Shaikh knew how to provoke "a state of spiritual concentration." None the less, some of the *fuqarâ* would come out of the *khalwah* almost in a state of collapse, dazed in both body and soul, hut the Shaikh was indifferent to this provided that some degree of direct knowledge had been achieved. (105)

Other ideas which would also have been of relevance to a monk are:

Let him examine himself: if what his heart hides is more precious than what his tongue tells of, then he is *one whom his Lord hath made certain* (Qur'an XI, 17), but if not, then he has missed far more than he has gained.... The Prophet said: "Knowledge of the inward is one of the Secrets of God. It is wisdom from the treasury of His Wisdom which He casteth into the heart of whomsoe'er He will of His slaves" and "Knowledge is of two kinds, knowledge in the Heart which is the knowledge that availeth, and knowledge upon the tongue which is God's evidence against His slave." This shows that secret knowledge is different from the knowledge that is bandied about. (89–90)

The Prophet said, "The earth shall never be found lacking in forty men whose Hearts are as the Heart of the Friend [Abraham] of the All-Merciful."...and where else is this body of men to be found save amongst the Rememberers, who are marked out for having devoted their lives to God?

"From men *whose sides shrink away front beds*." (Qur'an XXXII, 16)

"To *men whom neither bartering nor selling diverteth from the remembrance of God*." (Qur'an XXIV, 36)

In addition to the Sufi practice of using the rosary, reciting the litanies, and remembering God (*dhikr*) through the invocation of His Holy Name, occasionally members of some orders participate in certain movements which have been called a "sacred dance." Merton highlighted the following:

None the less, the subjection of the body to a rhythmic motion is never, for the Sufis, any more than an auxiliary; its purpose is simply to facilitate *dhikr* in the fullest sense of remembrance, that is, the concentration of all the faculties of the soul upon the Divine Truth represented by the Supreme Name or some other formula which is uttered aloud or silently by the dancers. It was explained to me by one of the Shaikh's disciples that just as a sacred number such as three, seven or nine, for example, acts as a bridge between multiplicity and Unity, so rhythm is a bridge between agitation and Repose, motion and Motionlessness,

> fluctuation and Immutability. Fluctuation, like multiplicity, cannot be transcended in this world of perpetual motion but only in the Peace of Divine Unity; and to partake of this Peace in some degree is in fact that very concentration which the *dhikr* aims at. . . .
>
> If the grace of ecstasy is beyond you, it is not beyond you to believe that others may enjoy it. . . . None the less I do not say that dancing and manifestations of ecstasy are among the essentials of Sufism. But they are outward signs which come from submersion in remembrance. Let him who doubts try for himself, for hearsay is not the same as direct experience. (95)
>
> God commended the people of the Book [Jews and Christians] for their rapture, mentioning one of its aspects with the highest praise: *When they hear what hath been revealed unto the Prophet, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears from their recognition of the Truth.* (Qur'an V, 83) (93)
>
> The Prophet said: "The solitary ones take precedence, they who are utterly addicted to the remembrance of God." (94)
>
> Thus when the Prophet was asked what spiritual strivers would receive the greatest reward, he replied: "Those who remembered God most." Then when questioned as to what fasters would be most rewarded he said: "Those who remembered God most," and when the prayer and the almsgiving and the pilgrimage and charitable donations were mentioned, he said of each: "The richest in remembrance of God is the richest in reward." (97)

When Dr. Lings explains that the "litany comes as it were from midway between the Heart and the head," Merton boldly marks a following sentence, "Beyond litany is invocation in the sense of the word *dhikr*. This is a cry from the Heart, or from near to the Heart." (111)

A few pages ahead, Merton noted that another form of the invocation is found in groaning: "The Prophet said, 'Let him groan, for groaning is one of the Names of God in which the sick man may find relief.'" (113)

The first chapter in "Part Two: The Doctrine" is titled "Oneness of Being." In the fulfillment of the Gnostics' ascent, "They see directly face to face that there is naught in existence save only God and that *everything perisheth but His face,* not simply that it perisheth at any given time but that it hath never not perished. . . . Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own, and a face of its Lord; in respect of its own face it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face of God it is Being. Thus there is nothing in existence save only God and His face, for *everything perisheth but His Face,* always and forever." (123)

What a spiritual novice must unlearn struck Merton:

> One of the first things that a novice has to do in the 'Alawî Tarîqah—and the same must be true of other paths of mysticism—is to unlearn much of the agility of "profane intelligence" which an al-'Alawî *faqîr* once likened, for my benefit, to the "antics of a monkey that is chained to its post," and to acquire an agility of a different order, comparable to that of a bird which continually changes the level of its flight. The Qur'an and secondarily the Traditions of the Prophet are the great prototypes in Islam of this versatility. (124)

Regarding the three levels of recitation said upon the rosary, Dr. Lings explains:

> What might be called the normal level of psychic perception, is concerned with the ego as such. This is the phase of purification. From the second standpoint this fragmentary ego has ceased to exist, for it has been absorbed into the person of the Prophet who represents a hierarchy of different plenitudes of which the lowest is integral human perfection and the highest is Universal Man (*al-Insân al-Kâmil*), who personifies the whole created universe and who thus anticipates, as it were, the Infinite, of which he is the highest symbol. The disciple aims at concentrating on perfection at one of these levels. From the third point of view the Prophet himself has ceased to exist, for this formula is concerned with nothing but the Divine Oneness. (125)

After Dr. Lings explains that "The soul is not merely immortal but Eternal, not in its psychism but in virtue of the Divine Spark that is in it," Merton boldly marked one line from a poem by Shaikh al-'Alawi:

> Thou seest not who thou art, for thou art, yet art not "thou." (127)

Merton then highlights the words quoted of al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE):

> There is no he but He, for "he" expresseth that unto which reference is made, and there can be no reference at all save only unto Him, for whenever thou makest a reference, that reference is unto Him even though thou knewest it not through thine ignorance of the Truth of Truths.... Thus "there is no god but God" is the generality's proclamation of Unity, and "there is no he but He" is that of the elect, for the former is more general, whereas the latter is more elect, more all-embracing, truer, more exact, and more operative in bringing him who useth it into the Presence of Unalloyed Singleness and Pure Oneness. (127–128)
>
> I have never looked at a single thing without God being nearer to me than it. (Abû 'Ubaidah, d. 639 CE) (128)

In concluding "Oneness of Being," Lings mentions that "the highest saints are referred to as the *Near,*" and that what the Qur'an means by "nearness" is defined by the words:

> *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein and God cometh in between a man and his own heart.* (Qur'an VIII, 24) (129)

Thomas Merton marked many paragraphs as important in "The Three Worlds." The chapter begins with the words of the Moroccan Shaikh ad-Darqâwî:

I was in a state of remembrance and my eyes were lowered and I heard a voice say: *He is the first and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden.* I remained silent, and the voice repeated it a second time, and then a third, whereupon I said: "As to *the First,* I understand, and as to *the Last,* I understand, and as to *the Inwardly Hidden,* I understand, but as to *the Outwardly Manifest,* I see nothing but created things." Then the voice said: "If there were any outwardly manifest other than Himself I should have told thee." In that moment I realized the whole hierarchy of Absolute Being. (131)

So realize, my brother, thine own attributes and look with the eye of the Heart at the beginning of thine existence when it came forth from nothingness; for when thou hast truly realized thine attributes, He will increase thee with His. (137)

One of thine attributes is pure nothingness, which belongeth unto thee and unto the world in its entirety. If thou acknowledge thy nothingness, He will increase thee with His Being. . . .

Extinction also is one of thine attributes. Thou art already extinct, my brother, before thou art extinguished and naught before thou art annihilated. Thou art an illusion and a nothingness in a nothingness. When hadst thou Existence that thou mightest be extinguished? Thou art *as a mirage in the desert that the thirsty man taketh to be water until he cometh unto it and findeth it to be nothing, and where he thought it to be, there findeth he God.* Even so, if thou wert to examine thyself, thou wouldst find God instead of finding thyself, and there would be naught left of thee but a name without a form. Being in itself is God's, not thine if thou shouldest come to realize the truth of the matter, and to understand what is God's through stripping thyself of all that is not thine, then wouldest thou find thyself to be as the core of an onion. If thou wouldst peel it, thou would peelest off the first skin, and then the second, and then the third, and so on, until there is nothing left of the onion. Even so is the slave with regard to the Being of the Truth.

It is said that Râbi'ah al-'Adawiyyah met one of the Gnostics and asked him of his state, and he replied: "I have trod the path of obedience and have not sinned since God created me," whereupon she said: "Alas, my son, thine existence is a sin wherewith no other sin may be compared." (137)

The text then refers to what must necessarily be attributed to God as follows: "Being, Beginninglessness, Endlessness, Absolute Independence, Incomparability, Oneness of Essence, of Quality and of Action, Power, Will, Knowledge, Life, Hearing, Speech, Sight." Merton was interested in the comments of Shaikh al-'Alawi:

Here he explaineth what belongeth unto God. See therefore, O Slave, what belongeth unto thee, for if thou shouldst qualify thyself with any of these qualities, thou wilt be contending with thy Lord. (131)

Such a statement reminds a seeker of his own essential emptiness, which were he to realize, he would gain the Divine Presence, for which he yearns.

One can imagine why Merton would have been drawn to the passages above which encourage the spiritual aspirant to recall his own "nothingness," for

> then He will be thy Hearing and thy Sight, and when He is thy Hearing and thy Sight, then wilt thou hear only Him and see only Him, for thou wilt be seeing Him with his Sight and hearing Him with His Hearing. (139)
>
> *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God.* Things lie hidden in their opposites, and but for the existence of opposites, the Opposer would have no manifestation. (140)

Merton was concerned with many of the passages which remind a person to accept both the blessings and the trials of life with an equal heart and to love God's will for us whether it brings ease or contraction into our lives:

> The Outwardly Manifest is veiled by naught but the strength of the manifestations, so be present with Him, nor be veiled from Him by that which hath no being apart from Him. Stop short at the illusion of forms, nor have regard unto the outward appearance of receptacles. Do not know Him only in His beauty, denying that cometh unto thee from His Majesty, but be deeply grounded in all the states, and consider Him well in opposites. Do not know Him in expansion only when He vouchsafeth, denying Him when He witholdeth, for such knowledge is but a veneer. It is not knowledge born of realization. (142–143)
>
> Be turned unto God, welcoming all that cometh unto thee from Him. Busy thyself with naught but let everything busy itself with thee, and do thou busy thyself with proclaiming the Infinite and saying there is no god but God, utterly independent therein of all things, until thou comest to be the same in either stare.... (144–145)

In "The Symbolism of the Letters of the Alphabet," Merton was particularly interested in the writings of Shaikh al-'Alawi with regard to the metaphysics of the manifested world and the nature of the Godhead, whose Essence is to be found in Qualities.

In "The Great Peace," Dr. Lings explains:

> The rhythm to which the breathing is subjected is the rhythm of creation and dissolution, of Beauty and Majesty. Breathing in represents creation, that is, the Outward Manifestation of the Divine Qualities...breathing out represents the "return" of the Qualities to the Essence, the next intake of breath is a new creation, and so on. The final expiring symbolizes the realization of the Immutability which underlies the illusory vicissitudes of creation and dissolution, the realization of the truth that "God was and there was naught else beside Him, He is now even as He was...." (159)
>
> The fullest attainment of inward Peace means the shifting of the consciousness from a secondary or illusory centre to the One True Centre, where the subject is...no longer created being but the Creator. This is in fact what is meant

> by "concentration"; it follows therefore that for one who is truly concentrated, the symbolism of breathing is necessarily inverted: breathing in becomes absorption of all in the Oneness of the Essence, and breathing out is the Manifestation of the Divine Names and Qualities. (159)
>
> To say that beyond his created plenitude Universal Man has an aspect of total extinction means that beyond this extinction he has an aspect of Absolute Plenitude, for his extinction is simply the measure of his capacity to receive. (160)

According to Shaikh al-'Alawi:

> [A] Gnostic may be dead unto himself and unto the whole world, and resurrected in his Lord, so that if thou shouldest ask him of his existence he would not answer thee inasmuch as he hath lost sight of his own individuality. Abû Yazîd al-Bistâmî was asked about himself and he said, "Abû Yazîd is dead—May God not have mercy on him!" This is the real death; but if on the Day of Resurrection thou shouldest ask one who hath died only the general death "Who art thou?" he would answer "I am so-and-so," for his life hath never ceased and he hath never sensed the perfume of death, but hath simply passed on from world to world, and none graspeth the meaning of the real death save him who hath died it. Thus have the Sufis a reckoning before the Day of Reckoning, even as the Prophet said: "Call yourselves to account before ye be called to account." They laboured in calling themselves to account until they were free to contemplate their Lord, and theirs is a resurrection before the Resurrection. (161)
>
> Extinction and submersion and annihilation come suddenly upon the Gnostic, so that he goeth out from the sphere of sense and loseth all consciousness of himself, leaving behind all his perceptions, nay, his very existence. Now this annihilation is in the Essence of Truth, for there floweth down over him from the Holiness of the Divinity a flood which compelleth him to see himself as the Truth's Very Self in virtue of his effacement and annihilation therein. (163)

Regarding extinction from oneself and subsistence in God, the great Andalusian saint, whose tomb has become the spiritual center of Alexandria in Egypt,

> Abû'l 'Abbas al-Mursî used to pray, "O Lord, open our inward eyes and illumine our secret parts, and extinguish us from ourselves, and give us subsistence in Thee, not in ourselves." (167)

The point is made that even though someone be blessed with Union with God, this in no way absolves him from following the revealed law. To be fully mature in the spiritual life

> one should combine outward stability with inward o'erwhelmedness, so that one is outwardly spiritual effort and inwardly contemplation, outwardly obedient to

> God's command and inwardly submissive (*mustaslim*) to His Utter Compulsion and that the Supreme State belongs to those "who combine sobriety (*sahw*) with uprootedness (*istilam*)"...so that outwardly they are among creatures and inwardly with the Truth, integrating two opposite states and combining the wisdom of each. (168)

In the same vein, Merton marked passages which discussed the true cause of the great sadness Jacob felt at the loss of Joseph. A disciple of Shaikh al-'Alawî had inquired of his master how the "beauty of Joseph could have diverted [Jacob's] attention from the beauty of the Truth," and the Shaikh explained:

> Jacob's exceeding sorrow was not for the person of Joseph but because Joseph was for him a place of the Manifestation of the Truth, so that when Joseph was by, Jacob's own presence with God was increased in intensity. (164)
>
> Therefore the Truth trieth those whom He loveth by the sudden disappearance of the form, so that their vision may be deflected from the part unto the whole, as He did with Jacob. (165)

Merton also highlighted a magnificent line from al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), which refers to this meeting of the finite with the Infinite:

> Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own and a face of its Lord; in respect of its own face it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face of God it is Being. (169)

Among the many ideas that attracted Merton in "Gnosis" is one regarding sight:

> But the Shaikh affirms that it is none the less possible for the outward eye, while still "in this world," to see the Truth, provided that it can first achieve a perfect co-ordination with the inward eye. [Footnote by Dr. Lings: During this life, the Saint's "resurrection in God" is a resurrection of the soul, not yet of the body. But through the coordination just referred to, he may also have foretaste of the resurrection of the body.] (172)
>
> The outward eye is the ray of the inward eye and the *faqîr* should not open his outward eye (in the hope of seeing Reality) until the connection hath been established between it and his inward eye. When, in virtue of this connection, his outward eye hath become pure inward vision, then he will see the Lord of the verse *Naught is like unto Him* with all his faculties, just as he will also hear Him with all his faculties.... (172)
>
> The sight cannot attach itself unto nothing, and that therefore no object of sight can be void of the outward manifestation of the Truth, for things in themselves are naught. (174)

Merton was interested in the meaning and inner purposes of the ritual ablution before prayer in Islam, and the symbolism of water. In respect that

everything returns to the Archetype, the world is compared to an iceberg and man, to the water flowing from its sides, melting back to Essence. Among the paragraphs which Merton singled out is:

> The purpose of the ablution in Islam is the removal of inward impurity symbolized by various modes of outward impurity.... The meaning of defilement (*hadath*), continues the Shaikh, is ephemeral existence (*hudûth*), that is, the existence of other than God. This is not ousted from the heart of the Gnostic, and its film is not removed from his inward eye to be replaced in his sight by Eternity, save through his finding the Water and his Purification therewith. Except he be purified by It, he is far from the Presence of his Lord, unfit to enter It, let alone to sit therein. Likewise the slave will not cease to suppose the existence of defilement in all creatures until he have poured this Absolute Water over their outward appearance. Without It he will not cease to condemn them, and how should his verdict be revoked when he seeth their defilement with his eyes, and when his Heart believeth in the independent existence of creation? (182–183)

In "The Ritual Prayer," Merton is seen to have taken a special interest in the deepest significance of the positions in Muslim prayer. Shaikh al-'Alawi explains that after the worshipper begins his prayer by raising his hands and proclaiming "God is Most Great," or *Allahu Akbar,* he begins gradually to draw himself in more and more as he approaches the Divine. The extremity of Nearness is attained by the state of prostration.

> The Prophet said: "The slave is nearest his Lord when in prostration." At his prostration he descendeth from the stature of existence into the fold of nothingness, and the more his body is folded up, the more his existence is folded up.... (187–188)
>
> Before his prostration the Gnostic had the upright stature of existence, but after his prostration he hath become extinct, a thing lost, effaced in himself and Eternal in his Lord.... (188)
>
> When the worshipper hath obtained the degree of prostration and hath been extinguished from existence, he prostrateth himself a second time that he may be extinguished from that extinction. Thus is his (second) prostration identical with his rising up from (the first) prostration, which rising signifieth subsistence. (188)
>
> He is prostrate with regard unto the truth, upright with regard unto creation, extinct (even as a Divine Quality is extinct) in the Transcendent Oneness, subsistent in the Immanent Oneness. Thus is the prostration of the Gnostics uninterrupted, and their union knoweth no separation. The Truth hath slain them with a death that knoweth no resurrection. Then He hath given them Life, Endless Life, that knoweth no death. (189)
>
> After the final prostration before the end of the prayer, the worshipper resumes the sitting position from which, after expressions of devotion to God and invocations of Peace on the Prophet, himself and all the faithful, he seals

> the prayer by turning his head to the right with the words *As-Salâmu ʿalaikum*—Peace be on you! (190)
>
> Of this final sitting position the Shaikh says: He must take a middle course when he returneth unto creation, that is, he must be seated, which is midway between prostration and standing, that he may make good his intercourse with creation. For if he went out unto creatures in a state of being prostrate, that is, in a state of extinction and obliteration, he could take no notice of them. Nor must he go out unto creation standing, that is, far from the Truth as he used to be before his extinction, for thus would he go out unto creation as one created and there would be no good in him and none would profit from his return. Even so he must take a middle course, and "midmost is best in all things." It is said: "Long live the man who knoweth his own worth and taketh his seat beneath it!" Now a man gaineth knowledge of his worth only at his obliteration. Thus is a sitting position required of him after his obliteration. (190)

On the subject of meditation, the Algerian master wrote:

> Meditation may be on things that are made, but not on the Essence, even as the Prophet said: "Meditate upon all things, but meditate not on the Essence lest ye perish." Thought is only used with regard unto what is made, but when the Gnostic hath attained unto the Maker, then is his thought changed to wonderment. Thus is wonderment the fruit of thought, and once it hath been achieved the Gnostic must not swerve from it nor change it for that which is its inferior. Nor can he ever have enough of wonderment at God, and indeed the Prophet would say: "O Lord, increase me in marveling at Thee." Meditation is demanded of the *faqir* whilst he be on his journey. One meditateth on the absent: but when He that was sought is Present in Person, then is meditation changed into wonderment. (190–191)

Merton also underlined these words regarding the wasting of one's time:

> Trifling, for the Gnostic, is being busied with that which concerneth him not, once he hath realized the degree of Perfection; and everything except being busied with God is such frivolity and trifling as justifieth neither a turn of the head thereunto nor the waste of a moment of time thereon. (191)

In the section on the funeral prayer, parallels between the spiritual and the physical death struck Merton. As one will be passive in the hands of whoever washes one's body at death, so should the disciple be in the hands of his master "lest he be left with all his impurities upon him by reason of his stubbornness and willfulness and want of passivity." Merton must have wrestled with the fame which came in conjunction with his writings. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why he highlighted the following:

> "Bury thine existence in the earth of obscurity, for if a seed be not buried it bringeth not forth in fullness." (Ibn Ata Allah d. 1309 CE)

> [The Shaykh says:] "Indeed, there is nothing better for the disciple than obscurity after attainment, and no harm is greater for him than fame at that moment, that is, at the moment of his entry unto God, not afterwards, for after his burial in the earth of obscurity there is no harm in the spreading of his fame inasmuch as the growth hath come after the roots were firm, not before, so that there is no doubt that he will bring forth in fullness." (193–194)
>
> Analogously, by a symbolism parallel to this last, the realization of Supreme Sainthood is mirrored in the funeral prayer. Just as the body yields up the soul at death, so the soul, at spiritual death, yields up the Spirit. The Shaikh says: "Bodily death taketh not place without the Angel of Death, and even so spiritual death taketh not place save through the intermediary of a Master who knoweth how to grasp the Spirits of his disciples."
>
> "The soul is precious, yet for Thee will I exchange it,
> And being slain is bitter, yet in Thy Good Pleasure is it sweet." (194)

In the funeral prayer itself, the four affirmations of the greatness of God are recited so that the one who has died may be reminded of the four Aspects of Being, the Firstness and Lastness, and Outward Manifestation and Inward Hiddenness. Then this soul can find no outlet: "His spirit departeth and his body goeth to nothing, inasmuch as the directions of space exist no longer for him through his finding not even so much as the breadth of a fingertip left vacant by these four Aspects, whithersoever he turneth. Even if he turn unto himself, he findeth that he himself is one of the Aspects, and so it is wherever else he turn, according to His Words *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God*. Thus when the rapt one turneth his face unto himself [he] seeds in the mirror of his existence the Face of God."

Thus, in the service itself, the seeker has a final reminder of his essential nothingness before God—which indeed would seem to be the goal of Realization.

The final phrase of this work which Merton noted was a Prophetic saying revealed by God in His Words. One cannot help but imagine that Merton's writings and efforts were intended to please his Lord and draw men to His Remembrance and His worship.

> The dearest of men unto Me is he who maketh Me dear unto men, and maketh men dear unto me. (195)

NOTES

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1. The most recent edition is titled *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, Shaikh Ahmad Al-ʿAlawî, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993). It contains two new chapters which Dr. Lings now feels would have been of great interest to Merton.

2. *Faqir,* pl. *fuqara*—this term refers to someone who becomes a disciple of a master with the intention of emptying himself for God. The root "f-q-r" means "poverty" or "emptiness." A spiritual martyr is someone who has achieved this emptiness and can be said to have achieved what Saint John of the Cross meant by "Die before you die." Humility is a form of this effort.

15

The Sufi Way of Love and Peace

Nasrollah Pourjavady

To speak of love as one of the pillars of world peace may at first sound like a meaningless truism. Everyone would agree that animosity, war, and strife come to an end once love and friendship come in between. A more careful examination of the relation between love and peace, however, shows that what seems to be a truism is not really so. We know that having love and compassion for all of humanity, and in fact for all of God's creatures, are fundamental teachings in most religions, yet the history of religions has witnessed many wars and even holocausts. In our own time, acts of terrorism are committed for the sake of religious goals. In the face of all of this we need to answer the question: How can atrocious and violent acts of killing innocent people be justified by any religion that claims to have peace, love, and compassion for all humanity as its primary goals and objectives?

Wars have been waged not only by the followers of different religions, but also by different groups and sects within the same religion. We do not need to mention how the Protestant and Catholic sects in Christianity have treated each other in the past or how Sunni and Shiite Muslims fight each other even today in some Muslim countries. How can the followers of two religions, who claim to worship a merciful and compassionate God and follow almost the same ethical teachings, fight with one another and kill each other? Even more, how can the followers of two sects of the same religion kill each other in the name of one and the same God?

The answer to these questions, I believe, lies in the way that the adherents of different religions and sects, *madhahib* (sing. *madhhab*),[1] have interpreted the original vision or revelation of their religion, and the kind of relationship they have established between the human being and God. The basic teachings of a religion, which are found in its scriptures, can be read and understood differently by different people in each religion. Moreover, people can enter into different kinds of relationships with their Lord. To use the language of the Muslim theologians (*mutakallimun*) and some mystics, particularly the followers of the school of the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabi

(d. 1240 CE), God has many Names and Attributes. People in different circumstances and at different times may approach God through one or another of these Divine Names and Attributes, thereby entering a particular relationship with Him.

Let me illustrate this point by giving some examples of different names of God in Islam. One of these is *al-Ghani,* literally meaning "the Rich," which implies the Divine Attribute of Self-Sufficiency. God is said to be *al-Ghani,* while human beings, and in fact all creatures, are said to be poor (*faqir*) and in need of Him (see, for example, Qur'an 35:15).[2] All creatures are in the same relationship with God, the Self-Sufficient Being, because they need Him for their existence. God is also named Lord (*al-Rabb*), which denotes another relationship that human beings may have with the Divine Being (see, for example, the first verse of the Qur'an, "Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds"). If a person recognizes God as his or her Lord, then he or she is the Lord's vassal (*marbub*), or His slave or servant (*ʿabd*). When a person worships God, he or she enters into another relationship with Him. In this relationship, God is the Worshipped One (*maʿbud*), whereas the human being is the worshipper (*ʿabid*).

One of the most significant relationships between the human being and God is *ʿubudiyya,* which is most often translated as "servitude." However, to be more exact, the term means "slavery." God is the Master—the Lord—and the human being is His slave or servant. Another relationship that has played a prominent role in Muslim religious thinking, particularly among the mystics, is love. According to this relationship, God is the Beloved (*mahbub* or *maʿshuq*), while human beings are the lovers (sing. *muhibb*). As a lover of God, the Sufis say that the human being "makes love" with the Divine Beloved and finally reaches a state of union (*wisal*) with Him.[3]

These two relationships—that of master–slave and beloved–lover—between God and man have had a great impact on the lives of Muslims throughout the centuries. Though both relationships exist together in Muslim religious experience, each has its own characteristics and has shaped the religious mentality and the social and cultural life of Muslims in different ways. The main characteristic of the master–slave relationship is power and domination versus submission. The Qur'an states that the religion of God is submission (*al-Islam,* Qur'an 3:19). The Lord dominates and imposes His will on the slave, and the slave must offer total submission to the Lord. In the words of an Arabic saying, "Whatever the slave has is in the hands of his Master." The slave (*ʿabd*) owns nothing, not even himself or herself. This is why the word *ʿabd,* as a description of the relationship between the human being and God, is best translated as "slave." The human being's submission to the Lord takes different forms in the acts of worship that one performs. This is expressed symbolically in the different postures that one makes during prayer, where the slave bows down before the Lord.

The love relationship between the human being and God also has its own characteristics, some of which are similar to the master–slave relationship. For example, the lover must submit (*aslama*, from the same root as *islam*) to the will of the Beloved. However, this is not done out of servitude, but rather out of love and the desire to unite with the Beloved. In other words, the lover, by virtue of love itself, has a propensity to identify with the Beloved. There is another important difference between a love relationship and a master–slave relationship: whereas the latter is characterized by power and domination, the former is characterized by love and beauty. Muslim theologians, philosophers, and mystics have divided the Divine Attributes into two distinct types: those belonging to the category of *jalal* (''glory'' or ''majesty'') and those belonging to the category of *jamal* (''beauty''). The two kinds of relationships between the human being and God can be subsumed under these two categories of attributes. The master–slave relationship is characterized by the attribute of *jalal*, while the lover–beloved relationship is characterized by the attribute of *jamal*. To use expressions made famous by the historian of religion Rudolf Otto, we might say that the master–slave relationship represents the *mysterium tremendum*, whereas the lover–beloved relationship represents the *mysterium fascinans*.[4]

The feeling of power in the *mysterium tremendum* and the feeling of desire in the *mysterium fascinans* cause two different psychological states to arise in the personalities of the slaves of God and the lovers of God, respectively. The religious mentality of a person who sees himself or herself as a slave of God is different from the religious mentality of a person who tries to be a lover of Divine Beauty. These different mentalities will also have an effect on the relationships that both types of believers establish with other people. Just as those who see themselves as slaves of the Lord have a different mentality from those who try to love and adore Absolute Beauty, a society that is dominated by the idea of the power of God, the *mysterium tremendum*, is not the same as a society that is dominated by the idea of love, the *mysterium fascinans*. I shall try to show this difference by relating a historical incident that took place over 12 centuries ago.

In the year 877 CE charges were brought against a group of Sufis in Baghdad by a Hanbalite traditionalist named Ghulam al-Khalil. These Sufis were the famous spiritual master Abu'l Husayn Nuri and his friends Raqqam and Abu Hamza. The story of their trial and what Nuri did when the executioner was going to carry out his execution is reported in several sources, including the *Kashf al-Mahjub* (The Unveiling of the Veiled) of 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri (d. 1071 CE):

> When Ghulam al-Khalil persecuted the Sufis, Nuri and Raqqam and Abu Hamza were arrested and conveyed to the Caliph's palace. Ghulam al-Khalil urged the Caliph to put them to death, saying that they were heretics (*zanadiqa)*, and the Caliph immediately gave orders for their execution. When the executioner

> approached Raqqam, Nuri rose and offered himself in Raqqam's place with utmost cheerfulness and submission. All the spectators were astounded. The executioner said: "O young man, the sword is not a thing that people desire to meet so eagerly as you have welcomed it; and your turn has not yet arrived." Nuri answered: "Yes, my doctrine is founded on preference (*ithar*). Life is the most precious thing in the world. I wish to sacrifice for my brethren's sake the few moments that remain. In my opinion, one moment of this world is better than a thousand years of the next world, because this is the place of service (*khidmat)*and that is the place of proximity (*qorbat)*, and proximity is gained by service." The tenderness of Nuri and the fineness of his saying astonished the Caliph (who was informed by a courier of what had passed) to such a degree, that he suspended the execution of the three Sufis.[5]

The above story is usually cited as an example of the practice of preference (*ithar*) by the Sufis. In fact, it comes at the beginning of Hujwiri's chapter on preference in *Kashf al-Mahjub. Ithar,* as an altruistic act, is one of the manifestations of love and compassion. Thus, the doctrine that Nuri referred to in his response to the executioner was both the doctrine of preference and the doctrine of love. Nuri and his Sufi friends felt that the best way to approach God and to relate to him is through love. In fact, one of the charges brought against Nuri was that he said, "I love God, and God loves me." Nuri's act of preference on behalf of his friends was the outcome of his love for God. His action represents the selflessness of submission in the lover–beloved relationship, whereas the action of the Caliph and his executioner represents the element of power in the master–slave relationship.

Nuri's doctrine obviously seems praiseworthy and in accordance with orthodox beliefs. Then why was he condemned by al-Khalil for having said, "I love God, and He loves me?" The problem lies in the word that Nuri used to express his idea. The word that is commonly used by Muslims to express the love relation between human beings and God is *hubb*. This is, in fact, the word that is used in the Qur'an when it says, "[God] loves them and they love Him" (Qur'an 5:54). Nuri himself referred to the same verse when he was defending himself against his enemy's allegation. However, his argument was not accepted because he used the Arabic word *ʿishq* instead of *hubb*. The difference between these two words is that while *hubb* is a generic word that is used to express love and friendship in general, *ʿishq,* which means "desire," usually refers to the love that exists between lovers, that is, between a man and a woman. At that time, there was a grave controversy about the use of the word *ʿishq* for expressing a person's relationship to God, and Nuri was one of the first Sufis who dared to do so. This controversy seems quite similar to the one that existed earlier for the Christian mystic Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. fifth or sixth century CE), when he used the Greek word *eros* instead of *agape* when he referred to the love of God.[6]

Although Nuri failed to convince his opponents that one can use the word *ʿishq* to express the human relationship with God, the Sufis increasingly

began to use this word for the very same purpose. The use of this word and its derivatives (such as *ʿashiq,* "yearner" or "desirer," and *maʿshuq,* "the one desired or yearned for") became even more popular when the Sufis began to express their ideas and mystical experiences through poetry, particularly in Persian. By the early twelfth century CE, an entire metaphysics was constructed on the idea of *ʿishq.*

One of the best expositions of the doctrine of mystical love in Islam can be found in a rather small book titled *al-Sawanih* (literally, "Auspicious Omens"), which may be translated roughly as "Meditations on Love."[7] Written by Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 1126 CE), the younger brother of the famous theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), the *Sawanih* is composed of some 70 short chapters, all of which deal with the metaphysics and psychology of love. As a spiritual heir of the famous Sufi martyr Hallaj (d. 922 CE), Ahmad al-Ghazali believed in Essential Love, an idea that was adopted by many mystics and Persian poets. According to this doctrine, Love is not simply a Divine Attribute, but the very Essence of God. Love is the basic principle, the *arche* of the entirety of existence, as well as the driving force of everything that exists.

Ahmad al-Ghazali expresses his ideas mainly through metaphors and romantic anecdotes. For example, Love is said to be a bird that has left its nest in Eternity and has flown into this world of temporal existence for a brief sojourn before returning to its nest. In its essence, Love is absolute unity (*tawhid*), but in its journey to this world, it appears both as the lover and as the beloved. The lover par excellence is the Spirit (*ruh*), the Neo-Platonic *nous,* which has been separated from its origin and now yearns for union. Just as the origin of the lover is Love itself, the origin of the beloved is Love too. The Beloved is absolute Beauty (*jamal*), which manifests itself to the lover and brings him or her back to his or her origin. This metaphysical event has a corresponding analogy in the phenomenal world. In fact, the journey of the Spirit back to the Beloved must be accomplished through human beings. It is the spirit in man that seeks union with the divine Beauty, the Beloved. This mystical union is achieved through the self-annihilation of the lover. Once the lover loses his or her identity in the Beloved, all that remains is the Beloved, who is itself identical with Love. This is how unity (*tawhid*), the basic principle of faith in Islam, is realized.

The doctrine of Essential Love, as expounded by Ahmad al-Ghazali and other Persian Sufis and poets, presents a view of the human being and the world that is different from the view based on the master–slave relation. In the master–slave relation, the human being is always the slave and God is always the Master. The position of each side is fixed. God wills and commands, while the human being is obliged to obey. In the lover–beloved relation, however, the positions of the lover and the beloved are not fixed. In other words, the love relation between the human being and God is reciprocal. At times, the human being is the lover whereas God is the

Beloved, but at other times God is the Lover whereas man is the beloved. This is why Nuri said, ‘‘I love God and God loves me.’’ Another famous Sufi, Abu al-Hasan al-Kharaqani (d. 1034 CE), used to say, ‘‘At times, I am [God's] Abu al-Hasan and at times [God] is my Abu al-Hasan.’’ Ecstatic utterances such as these are said to express the same idea as the Qur'anic statement, ‘‘[God] loves them, and they love Him’’ (Qur'an 5:54).[8] The Sufis have even claimed that God's love for the human being precedes the human being's love for God, and if it were not for the fact that God had favored the human being with His Essential Love, Mercy, and Compassion, the human being could never love God or His creatures.

The human being's love for God's creatures brings us to another characteristic of the love relationship in Islam. In the master–slave relationship, God the Master orders the human being to be kind to His creatures. In the love relationship, however, the human being loves all other human beings, and indeed all creatures, because the human being loves God. One's love for God and His creation are ultimately affected by the same cause. Ahmad al-Ghazali and the other mystics that followed the doctrine of Essential Love believed that Love has a single nature. Whether it is God's love for the human being, the human being's love for God, the human being's love for other human beings, the love between a man and a woman, or the love between a mother and her child, it is all of the same nature, the difference being only in the context and the intensity, not in the essence.

This idea of the oneness of Love is similar to what some mystical philosophers, such as Mulla Sadra (d. 1640 CE), and Illuminationist (*ishraqi*) philosophers, such as Suhrawardi (d. 1191 CE), said about existence and light. According to these philosophers, existence (*wujud*) is a single reality, wherever it may be and in whatever object it is found. The same is true of light. The light of the sun and the light of a candle, for example, are a single reality, although they exist in different degrees. Existence too, whether it is predicated of God, of the human being, or of any other existing thing, is one and the same reality, even though in each one of these subjects this reality has a different degree. The differences that we perceive are simply differences of ‘‘analogical gradation’’ (*tashkik*): both existence and light are unitary realities, but in different things they have different degrees of intensity or weakness.

What we have said about the essential oneness and the analogical gradations of love, light, and existence applies to beauty (*jamal*) too. Beauty is one single reality whether it is absolute or relative, whether it is in the spiritual realm or the phenomenal world, whether it is in the human body, in the sunset, or in a flower. The only difference is in its intensity or context. Since beauty is one single reality, love for a beautiful object is a manifestation of love for the absolute or divine Beauty. To see and appreciate sunlight, whether it is in a garden or on a mountain, or simply a ray shining through a window into a room, is ultimately to appreciate the essence of light.

Likewise, to love other human beings is to love God. There is no such thing as truly profane beauty, just as there is no such thing as truly profane love. The only problem is that sometimes one loves a relative form of beauty and mistakenly thinks that it is absolute Beauty. The love of a relative form of beauty, such as in the form of a human being, should act as a transition—a bridge—that takes the lover toward absolute Beauty, the Supreme Being.

The lover's union with the Beloved is the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest. In the early history of Sufism, some mystics felt that this goal could not be attained in this life, but only in the next life, when the lover went to Paradise. Muslims also believed that the believer could only experience the beatific vision of God in Paradise. The experience of reaching the presence of the Lord in Paradise and seeing Him face-to-face is implied in the Qur'an, where it says that in Paradise the believers are greeted with a greeting of *salam* from their Lord (Qur'an 36:58). Besides being the Muslim greeting, *salam* also means "peace" or "well-being." Thus, it is important that the Divine Beloved greets the Lover in this way. The above verse of the Qur'an demonstrates that Perfect Peace is found in Heaven and that it proceeds from God Himself. In fact, *al-Salam* ("The Peace-Maker") is one of the Divine Names that is mentioned in the Qur'an (Qur'an 59:23). Since Perfect Peace and well-being is experienced in its most essential form in Heaven, the Qur'an also calls Paradise *Dar al-Salam* ("The Abode of Peace," Qur'an 10:25).

Although the state of *salam* is most truly experienced by the believer in the Hereafter, human beings can also enjoy it to some degree in this life too. God sends *salam,* to his Prophets, such as Noah, Abraham, and Moses. *Salam* in the sense of peace in this world is but a reflection of the absolute *salam* experienced by believers in Paradise. Not only does God bestow *salam* upon the hearts of His Prophets and the believers here in this world, but the believers themselves also wish well-being and peace on each other when they meet.

But is it also possible for a believer, as a lover of the Divine Beloved, to experience the Heavenly *salam* in this life too, or do we have to wait until we die and go to Paradise? In the first two or three centuries of Islamic history, Muslims generally believed that the Heavenly Peace and the vision of God that it entails could be experienced only after death. However, in later centuries, particularly after the mystics developed the doctrine of Love, Muslims began to believe that one could have such an experience in this life too, though in a different way. While one could see the face of the Lord and hear His voice through one's eyes and ears in Paradise, here in this world the lovers of God could have that experience only in their hearts. The only exception was the Prophet Muhammad, who actually had a vision of God and experienced Perfect Peace and well-being in his night journey to Heaven (*mi'raj*). According to the Qur'an, the Prophet experienced the Heavenly state of *salam* throughout that night, until the rising of the dawn (Qur'an 97:5).

The journey of the Prophet toward the Divine Beloved has been shared and relived by many saints, or "Friends of God" (*awliya' Allah*), throughout Islamic history. Thanks to the presence of these saints in Muslim societies, believers have been able to enjoy the grace (*baraka*) of the Peace that accompanies the vision of God and union with the Beloved. It is precisely this inner spiritual Peace, this *salam,* which is needed more than ever in our turbulent world today. In order to attain any degree of it, we Muslims need to follow the path of Love shown to us by the Prophets and saints. It is only by virtue of this path that we can enter the lover–beloved relationship with God, a relationship that requires us to forget hatred and wish mercy, forgiveness, and compassion upon all of humanity. *Wa al-Salam* ("And Peace").

NOTES

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1. The Arabic word *madhhab* literally means "way" or "path," "the way in which one proceeds." In Arabic usage, it most commonly takes the connotation of "method" or "procedure," in the sense of the method or procedure of a particular school of Islamic jurisprudence. Hence, *madhhab* is most often understood as a synonym for "school of practice" especially a school of Islamic law. In Persian, these meanings are extended to include belief in formal doctrines. Hence, Dr. Pourjavady's use of *madhhab* as meaning "sect" or "religion." (Ed.)

2. In this verse, the Divine Name *al-Ghani* also carries the connotation of absoluteness: "Oh people! You are poor and in need of God (*al-fuqara' ila Allah*), but God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy (*wa Allahu huwa al-Ghani' al-Hamid*)." (Ed.)

3. The terms "make love" and "union" should not be taken literally, but are metaphorical or mythological in nature. Sufis often use terms with sexual connotations, such as *'ishq* ("desire") and *wisal* ("union"), as vehicles of comparison, to convey the idea that the spiritual and mystic union of the human being with God is a oneness that can only be compared to the most intense feelings of unification that a person experiences in day-to-day life. Since the ideal goal of love is the merging of two souls into one, this metaphor may also be used to describe the goal of the Gnostic (*'arif*), the "knower" of God. (Ed.)

4. These terms come from Otto's book, *Das Heilige,* usually translated in English as *The Idea of the Holy.* According to Otto, the human experience of religiosity comes from the dialectical relationship between two mysteries. *Mysterium tremendum* ("The Great Mystery") refers to the fear of unknown powers, the awe and dread that people have of forces beyond their control; *mysterium fascinans* ("The Fascinating Mystery") refers to the attractive power of the Holy, which draws people toward it

even against their will, like a moth to a candle flame. The moth to a candle flame analogy was often used by Sufis to express the attractive power of the love of God, which draws them ever closer until their human selves are annihilated in the "flame" of the Divine Essence. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* trans. John W. Harvey (1923; repr., London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 12–40. (Ed.)

5. 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufiism,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; repr., London, U.K.: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1976), 190–191.

6. The Greek word *eros* means "desire" or "yearning," as does the Arabic word *'ishq*. The Greek word *agape* is equivalent to the Arabic words *hubb* ("love") and *rahma* ("mercy"), depending on the context. In his discourse on the Divine Names, Pseudo-Dionysius uses *eros,* in the sense of divine longing, yearning, or passion, to describe the motivating force of creation. Most Christian theologians, however, would use the term *agape,* which connotes a more compassionate form of love, in such a context: "The divine longing (*eros*) is Good seeking good for the sake of the Good. That yearning (*eros*) which creates all the goodness of the world pre-existed superabundantly within the Good and did not allow it to remain without issue. It stirred [God] to use the abundance of his powers in the production of the world." *Pseudo-Dionysius: the Complete Works,* trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: The Paulist Press, 1987), 79–80. Pseudo-Dionysius, who may have been Syrian in origin, was one of the most influential mystical thinkers of early Christianity. His works would have been widely known in Greek and Syriac among the Nestorian Christians of Baghdad during the time of Nuri and would have been widely known in Latin translation in late twelfth-century Spain, during the time of Ibn 'Arabi. (Ed.)

7. See Ahmad al-Ghazali [*sic.*], *Sawanih. Aphorismen über die Liebe* (*Sawanih.* Aphorisms on Love), ed., Helmut Ritter (Istanbul, 1942). (Ed.)

8. The full Qur'anic verse in which this statement appears is as follows: "Oh you who believe! If any of you turns away from his religion, God will bring forth a people that He will love as they love Him, who are humble toward the believers, stern toward the unbelievers, who strive in the way of God and do not fear the blame of the blamers. This is the Grace of God, which He gives as He wills, for God is the All-Comprehensive, the All-Knowing" (Qur'an 5:54). (Ed.)

16

Sufi Women's Spirituality: A Theology of Servitude

Rkia Elaroui Cornell

The earliest book about Sufi women in Islam is *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat* (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees), by the great systematizer of Sufi doctrine, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE). Sulami, a resident of the city of Nishapur in eastern Iran, describes Sufi women as practicing a Theology of Servitude. He depicts this theology as a practice-oriented complement to the more theoretical doctrines followed by Sufi men.[1] The Theology of Servitude that was practiced by Sulami's Sufi women is based on the idea that spiritual engagement operates on two levels: an outer (*zahir*) level and an inner (*batin*) level. Each of these levels also has an outer and an inner dimension. On the inner level of spiritual engagement, the outer dimension consists of an engagement with God; this is because God is conceived as being outside of one's self (*nafs*). The inner dimension of the inner level of spiritual engagement consists of an engagement with one's own soul (*ruh*); this is because the soul represents a transcendence of the self (*nafs*), but it is also found within the self. The outer level of spiritual engagement in Sufi women's Theology of Servitude consists of religious practices that are part of the Sufi woman's engagement with her self. The outer dimension of these practices concerns the types of practices employed to discipline and transform the self. The inner dimension of the outer level of spiritual engagement concerns the transformation of the spiritual understanding that the religious practices and spiritual disciplines are meant to bring about.

According to Sulami, Sufi women are different from ordinary Muslim women because they practice *ta'abbud:* literally, "making oneself a slave" (*'abd*). *Ta'abbud* is the Arabic term that Sulami uses to designate the Theology of Servitude. For Sulami, *ta'abbud*, the Theology of Servitude, is the essence of Sufi women's spirituality. It is their means to divine inspiration, and it is the spiritual method that distinguishes them from their male Sufi counterparts.

Although Sulami makes the Theology of Servitude a characteristic of Sufi women, the concept for which it stands has long been part of Islamic piety. The Arabic term for worship (*ʿibada*) means ''servitude.'' The famous statement about worship in the Qur'an (Qur'an 51:56), "I have not created Jinn and humankind except to worship me (*illa li-yaʿbuduni*)," shows that the concept of servitude is all-inclusive: it envelops not only humans, but other forms of creation as well. The Theology of Servitude is also expressed in the Hadith, the Prophetic traditions of Islam. For example, in the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE), the Prophet Muhammad states that one of the names most favored by God is *ʿAbd Allah* (Slave of God). The other name most favored by God is *ʿAbd al-Rahman* (Slave of the Bestower of Grace). Both names include the term *ʿabd,* ''slave.''[2]

In the Qur'an, the concept of *Islam*—the submission of the self to God—is frequently expressed in terms of servitude. ''Selling oneself to God'' is the quintessential attribute of the true believer and is one of the spiritual traits that Islam shares with both Judaism and Christianity. This is stated explicitly in the following verse:

> Verily God has purchased from the believers their persons and possessions in return for Paradise. They fight in the cause of God and they slay and are slain. This is a binding promise on God, stated in truth in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. Who is more faithful to his promise than [God]? So, rejoice in the sale of yourself that you have concluded, for it is the supreme achievement.
>
> (Qur'an 9:111)

In his exegesis of the Qur'an titled *Haqaʾiq al-tafsir* (The Realities of Qur'an Interpretation), Sulami often discusses the Theology of Servitude through the words of Ahmad ibn 'Ata' (d. 921 CE), a famous Sufi of Baghdad. In these passages, another term for servitude is used: *ʿubudiyya,* which is commonly understood as ''worshipfulness,'' but literally means ''slavery.'' In his commentary on the Chapter on Women in the Qur'an (Qur'an 4, *Surat al-Nisaʾ*), Sulami quotes Ibn 'Ata' as saying: ''Servitude is a combination of four traits: (1) to be true to one's covenants; (2) to preserve moral rectitude; (3) to be satisfied with whatever one finds; (4) to patiently bear what has been lost.''[3]

Being true to one's covenants corresponds to the outer dimension of the outer level of spiritual engagement described above. Engagement with God is expressed in the Qur'an by the covenant struck between God and humanity before the creation of Adam (Qur'an 7:172). Engagement with other human beings depends on other types of covenants such as oaths and contracts, which figure prominently in the Qur'an as well (see, for example, Qur'an 16:94; 5:1, 5:89). Both types of engagements require renewal and reaffirmation, and both types rely on moral rectitude (Ibn 'Ata's second trait of

servitude) for their fulfillment. Moral rectitude is the key to the outward process of spiritual engagement. In Islam, moral rectitude entails the emulation of the Prophet Muhammad's actions and the embodiment of his moral fiber, which is fundamental to the concept of *Sunna*. The Qur'an states: "And you [Muhammad] are of great moral character" (Qur'an 68:4). Ibn 'Ata's third and fourth traits of servitude, which are to be satisfied with whatever one finds and to patiently bear what has been lost, correspond to the inner dimension of the outer level of spiritual engagement. These disciplines correspond to the Qur'anic teaching to regard the life of the world as nothing but a "sport and a pastime" (Qur'an 6:32), and help the seeker on the spiritual path turn her attention from the outer life of the world toward the Abode of the Hereafter and the inner life of the soul.

Elsewhere in *Haqa'iq al-tafsir* Sulami states: "Servitude (*'ubudiyya*) is built on six principles: (1) exaltation of God without reservation; (2) shame, which consists of the restlessness of the heart; (3) trial, which consists of desire; (4) fear, which consists of the abandonment of sin; (5) hope, which consists in following the example of the Prophet Muhammad and realizing his moral character; (6) awe, which consists of the abandonment of choice."[4] Most of these principles could be applied to any religion other than Islam with little or no modification. Exaltation of God is symbolic of a resolute faith. Falling for sin or debauchery causes shame and remorse for the ethical and moral person. Trials and tribulations shake one's faith to its core whenever they occur. Fear of punishment for evil deeds haunts everyone with a conscience. Hope for salvation or happiness, when channeled through divine exemplars such as prophets or spiritual masters, is a universal human aspiration. Awe of the Transcendent causes egos to melt away. In such a state, the believer abandons the idea that she is the architect of her own destiny. What is left is: "There is no god but God" (*la ilaha illa Allah*), the fundamental statement of divine unity (*tawhid*) in Islam and the basis of the Islamic creed. This is the Qur'anic meaning of servitude. It is the complete surrender or "sale" of oneself to God.

According to Ibn 'Ata', the sale of oneself to God meant above all else the suppression of the human ego, which, like the self in general, is designated by the Arabic term *nafs*. In the words of Ibn 'Ata', "The worst of your enemies is the *nafs* that is between your two sides."[5] This inner battle within the self is a prerequisite for the inward spiritual engagement that comprises the second, deeper dimension of the Theology of Servitude. The salvation of the soul, says Ibn 'Ata', can only be purchased with servitude.[6] Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765 CE), the sixth Shiite Imam stated: "The faithful slave of God must rely on three sets of foundational practices (*sunan*): the *Sunna* of God Most High, the *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and the *Sunna* of the Friends of God (*sunnat awliya' Allah*). The *Sunna* of God is the concealment of divine secrets. Allah Most High said: '[God alone] knows the unseen, and he does not allow anyone to be acquainted with

His mysteries' (72:26). The *Sunna* of the Messenger of God (Peace be upon him) is the experiential knowledge of creation. The *Sunna* of the Friends of God is the fulfillment of covenants and endurance in hardship and calamity."[7]

A similar understanding of servitude can be found in *Slavery as Salvation*, Dale B. Martin's study of the rhetoric of slavery in early Christianity. Realizing that the metaphor of slavery in the Gospels and the letters of the Apostle Paul stood for more than just humility, Martin examined late antique slavery in its full sociohistorical context and found that it was a complex institution. In the late Roman Empire, where social, economic, and political ties were often based on patronage, slavery might paradoxically be used as a metaphor for authority.[8] In a wealthy household, the slave-manager (Gr. *oikonomos*) would often have a considerable amount of authority. As a loyal and devoted servant of his master, a trusted slave might even have more authority than a free person of low status. A similar state of affairs existed in the Muslim world of Sulami's day, where relationships of loyalty and intimacy with a powerful patron were also expressed through the rhetoric of servitude. By making a vocation out of service to their divine Master, the Sufi women who practiced the Theology of Servitude could free themselves from the constraints that would normally have limited their role in society. In both cases, the early Christian and the medieval Muslim, slavery to God meant liberation, both from slavery to the self and from slavery to other human beings. Servitude to the Lord trumps servitude to all lesser lords, including one's own self. This is such an important concept in Islam that the word "lord" (*rabb*) as a status category is used only for God. For human beings, the word "lord" is only used in a metaphorical sense, as in the phrases, "head of the family" (*rabb al-ʿa'ila*) and "the intellectuals" (literally, "the lords of the intellects," *arbab al-ʿuqul*).

It is in this wider context of the Theology of Servitude that we must understand the statements made by Sufi women such as ʿA'isha bint Ahmad of Merv (d. late tenth century CE): "When the slave seeks glory in his servitude, his foolishness is revealed."[9] Just as the religious metaphor of slavery stands for more than humility, this statement is more than just a warning against the egoism of virtue. Islam, like Christianity, inherited much from late antiquity, including the relationship of slavery as an institution to wider, patronage-based social structures. In the Gospel of John, the Apostles of Jesus, as Slaves of Christ, are rhetorically transformed into the Friends of Christ and thus become figures of religious authority.[10] Likewise, for Sulami, being a Slave of God (*ʿabd Allah*) was necessary for becoming a Friend of God (*wali Allah*). Thus, the glory that ʿA'isha bint Ahmad warns her associates to avoid is not only that of pride in one's virtue but also the vainglory of seeking sainthood for the worldly patronage that it bestows.

Further comparisons can be made between the Christian and the Islamic uses of servitude as a religious metaphor and a spiritual practice.

Besides sharing a common understanding of slavery as a path to salvation, medieval Muslims and early Christians saw servitude as a way of overcoming the limitations of human nature.[11] Certain traditions that are critical of women in Islam attribute woman's inadequacy to the deficiencies of the female nature. For example, a well-known hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (ca. 860 CE) reports that the Prophet Muhammad informed a group of women that they were deficient in both intellect and religion.[12] Because of traditions such as these, it is not surprising to find that overcoming human nature—and especially the female nature—was a prominent concern for Sufi women. Commenting on the famous hadith: ''He who knows himself (or his inner self) knows his Lord'' (*man ʿarafa nafsahu ʿarafa rabbahu*), Futayma the wife of the Sufi Hamdun al-Qassar (d. late ninth century CE) remarks: ''When a person truly knows herself, her only characteristic is servitude and she takes pride in nothing but her master.''[13] This statement is perhaps intentionally ambiguous. Does Futayma mean to say that the Master who must be served before all else is God? Or does she mean to say that a woman serves God by serving her husband as her master? Maybe she means both, because Futayma's husband was a famous Sufi spiritual master. Either way, it is clear that the spiritual path for Sufi women was opened by servitude. The Sufi woman ʿUnayza of Baghdad (d. first half of the tenth century CE) stated: ''Human forms [literally, 'the molds of human nature'] are mines of servitude'' (*qawalib al-bashariyya maʿadin al-ʿubudiyya*).[14]

A major advantage of the Theology of Servitude was that it freed early Sufi women from the constraints imposed on them by their societies. As Slaves of God, they could separate themselves from the ordinary masses of women who did not share the same spiritual vocation. Choosing an independent life as ''career women'' of the spirit, they could travel without a chaperone, mix socially with men, teach men in public assemblies, and develop intellectually in ways that were not accessible to their non-Sufi sisters. This focus on spirituality as a personal vocation explains the surprising comment made by the Sufi woman Nusiyya bint Salman (d. early ninth century CE) upon the birth of her son: ''Oh, Lord! You do not see me as someone worthy of your worship. So because of this you have preoccupied me with a child!''[15]

As stated above, the spiritual method of the Theology of Servitude works on the outer and inner natures of the human being at the same time. Outwardly, it cultivates the Sufi attributes of scrupulous abstinence (*warʿ*), patience, poverty, and humility. Without these attributes, the human being is a slave to the ego-self. In the words of the female ascetic Umm Talq (d. mid-eighth century CE), ''The ego-self (*nafs*) is a king if you indulge it, but it is a slave if you torment it.''[16] Inwardly, the Theology of Servitude cultivates the attributes of fear, worshipfulness, gratitude, and reliance on God (*tawakkul*). These are the attributes that lead to perfection in religion, according to the words of the famous tradition: ''Worship God as if you see Him; for if you do not see Him, surely He sees you.''[17]

Sulami's book of early Sufi women implies that once women start practicing the Theology of Servitude, it is no longer acceptable for male authority figures to claim that women are deficient in religion, for servitude is the truest form of submission to God. Even more, because such women are successful in overcoming the lower aspects of their human natures, the highest levels of religious knowledge are now accessible to them. The limitlessness of this potential is reflected in the statement of Umm 'Ali, a Sufi woman from Nishapur, whose brother Abu Mansur ibn Hamshadh (d. 998 CE) was a famous preacher and acquaintance of Sulami: "One who is confirmed in the knowledge of servitude will soon attain the knowledge of lordship."[18] Umm 'Ali's point is made even more strongly in the words of Surayra al-Sharqiyya, a disciple in Nishapur of the Sufi master Abu Bakr al-Tamastani al-Farisi (d. 951 CE): "Eventually, servitude vanishes and only lordship remains."[19]

The above discussion has demonstrated that the Theology of Servitude practiced by early Sufi women is a key to many different types of spiritual engagements. The essence of this practice is to transcend the ego-self by "selling one's soul" to God. When stripped of its egoistic attachments, the human soul cannot be labeled as either male or female. The statements and teachings of early Sufi women, which were inspired not by the ego-self (*nafs*) but by the providentially motivated and divinely guided spirit-soul (*ruh*), are universal in their application. Thus, they are able to provide guidance for all human beings, regardless of gender. This, in fact, was why Sulami chose to devote an entire book to them. Today, a conservative reaction across the Muslim world has made of women—both body and soul—a major battlefield in the struggle between an idealized Islam and the West. The result of this struggle, in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Darfur, has been to deprive the Muslim woman of her personality and to make her an object for the exploitation of men. It is noteworthy and perhaps highly significant that many of the movements of religious reform in Islam that are most critical of women's role in society also condemn the religious perspective of Sufism. Sulami's book of Sufi women was lost to the Muslim world for more than 500 years, only to be discovered by accident in Saudi Arabia (and ironically in the library of Muhammad ibn Saud University, a major center of Wahhabi teaching) in the early 1990s. One cannot help but feel that the rediscovery of this work was meant to be, and that in current times, when freedoms of personal and religious expression are under severe attack in much of the Islamic world, the voices of the early Sufi women again need to be heard.

NOTES

1. Biographical information on Sulami can be found in the Introduction to Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Early Sufi Women, Dhikr an-niswa al-muta'abbidat*

as-sufiyyat, Translation and Introduction by Rkia E. Cornell (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999), 54–60.

2. See Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* 14/245.

3. Paul Nwyia, ed., *Trois Oeuvres inédites de Mystiques musulmans: Shaqiq al-Balkhi, Ibn 'Ata', Niffari* (Beirut, 1973), 45. This work contains only selected portions of Sulami's *Haqa'iq al-tafsir.*

4. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *al-Haqa'iq: Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim bi lisan ahl al-haqa'iq* (The Realities: the Interpretation of the Noble Qur'an in the Language of the People of Transcendent Reality). Sulami's exegesis of the Qur'an has not yet been edited definitively in Arabic. The manuscript from which the above quotation is taken was originally copied in 1854 and was registered in the manuscript collection at Bulaq, part of the city of Cairo, Egypt, in 1895 (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, ms. 481), 78.

5. Nwyia, *Trois Oeuvres inédites,* 60.

6. Ibid., 63.

7. Sulami, *al-Haqa'iq* manuscript, 81.

8. Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 56–57.

9. Sulami, *Dhikr an-niswa,* 258.

10. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation,* 54.

11. See, for example, the following statement made in the early Christian hagiographical tradition about the fourth-century ascetics of the Egyptian desert. These are "true servants [literally, "slaves"] of God...[through whom] the world is kept in being, and that through them too human life is preserved and honoured by God." Benedicta Ward, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto,* trans. Norman Russell (London and Oxford: Mowbray and Collins, 1980), "Prologue," 49–50.

12. See, for example, Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Kitab al-zakat: al-Zakat 'ala al-aqrab (Book of the Alms Tax: the Alms Tax for Near Relatives), hadith nos. 257 and 258.

13. Sulami, *Dhikr an-niswa,* 206.

14. Ibid., 248.

15. Ibid., 92.

16. Ibid., 118.

17. Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj an-Nisaburi (d. 875 CE), *Sahih Muslim bi-sharh al-Nawawı* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 1, 152–160.

18. Sulami, *Dhikr an-niswa,* 244.

19. Ibid., 246.

17

Fatima al-Yashrutiyya: The Life and Practice of a Sufi Woman and Teacher

Leslie Cadavid

INTRODUCTION

The following autobiography is taken from the writings of a twentieth-century woman saint and scholar from Palestine. Fatima al-Yashrutiyya (1891–1978) was the daughter of the Shadhili Sufi Shaykh ʻAli Nur al-Din al-Yashruti (d. 1899 CE), whose spiritual center (*zawiya*) was in Acre, Palestine (now part of the State of Israel). As one of Shaykh al-Yashruti's few surviving children, Fatima was the object of much affection and attention. When she was two years old, her father began to take her with him to attend meetings of theologians and Sufis. She was evidently gifted, for when the Shaykh died in 1899 at the venerable age of 108, and Fatima was but eight years old, she resolved to undertake the search for the knowledge that she had begun to taste, and took it upon herself to read as many books as she could on all aspects of Sufism and Islam. She continued these studies for the greater part of her life and used to meet regularly with scholars and Sufis throughout the Middle East. It was exceptional for a Muslim woman living in the early part of the twentieth century to meet in this way with men and to converse freely on scholarly topics. However, Fatima's behavior can be explained by her exceptional gifts in the fields of learning and also by the fact that she had already been well acquainted with the scholars of the day as a child. A popular legend says that the early Muslim theologian Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE) related of the woman saint Rabiʻa al-ʻAdawiyya (d. 801 CE), "I passed one whole night and day with Rabiʻa speaking of the Way and the Truth, but it never occurred to me that I was a man nor did it occur to her that she was a woman."[1]

Fatima al-Yashrutiyya never married, nor does she mention any possibility of marriage. This, too, was unusual and can perhaps be explained by her wholehearted devotion to the pursuit of knowledge and spiritual realization,

which took precedence over all else in her life. She died in 1978 in Beirut at the age of 87. She wrote four books: *Rihla ila al-Haqq* (A Journey Toward the Truth), *Masirati fi Tariq al-Haqq* (My Journey on the Path of the Truth), *Mawahib al-Haqq* (Gifts of the Truth), and *Nafahat al-Haqq* (Breaths of the Truth). It is rare to find among the Sufis a woman who wrote of her path to God for later generations to read. Indeed, few women Sufis wrote at all; for the most part we must content ourselves with later writings about them by their male followers or admirers. This rarity makes Yashrutiyya's writings all the more valuable.

In *A Journey Toward the Truth* we find the life story of Fatima's father, recounting his travels from his home in Tunisia, where he was born in 1791, to his final residence in Acre, Palestine. His life spanned more than a century and saw great changes in the Muslim world as so-called "progress" and Westernization crept in. Fatima al-Yashrutiyya would perhaps never have written her first work were it not for the fact that several disciples and friends had requested it of her, and she was then divinely inspired to write. This first book and the rest of her works were written primarily for the disciples of the Yashrutiyya Sufi order and not so much for outsiders unfamiliar with the world of the *tariqa* (Sufi spiritual path). In her works, *Sayyida* Fatima ("Lady Fatima," a term of respect) is full of praise for the Sufi way; she explains what the Sufi way is and how one must follow it, depending on the predisposition of one's soul. The last work she wrote was *My Journey on the Path of the Truth,* which contains her autobiography as well as descriptions of many members of her family. *Gifts of the Truth* and *Breaths of the Truth* tell about life in the Yashrutiyya Sufi order and record numerous miracles that graced her father and his disciples. The most important of Sayyida Fatima's works are *A Journey Toward the Truth* and *My Journey on the Path of the Truth,* and it is almost exclusively from these that the selections reproduced below have been taken. In translating these selections, I excluded the customary formulas following the mention of the Prophet Muhammad ("may peace and blessings be upon him") or following the name of a deceased saint or relative ("may God be pleased with him"), to ease the experience of the reader in English. I also use parenthetical notes to define or explain a word, such as *tariqa* (spiritual brotherhood), to minimize the need for endnotes.

The Yashrutiyya Sufi order (*tariqa*) is a branch of the Shadhiliyya *tariqa* founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258 CE), a spiritual master of Moroccan-Tunisian origin who spent the latter half of his career in Alexandria and is buried on the Red Sea coast of Egypt. Shaykh al-Yashruti's master was Shaykh [Muhammad ibn Hasan Zafir] al-Madani (d. 1847 CE), and Shaykh al-Madani's master was Mulay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi (d. 1823 CE), the founder of the Darqawiyya Sufi order, one of the most prominent branches of the Shadhiliyya in North Africa.[2] The Yashrutiyya Sufi order has many adherents throughout Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as in East Africa and even as far as South America.

Although more than one shaykh was elected to succeed Shaykh al-Yashruti during Sayyida Fatima's lifetime, it is safe to say that it was she who carried the *baraka* (blessing) of the order. Although she did not have a formal leadership role in the order, she was authorized to initiate others into it. Visiting disciples were interested in meeting her above everyone else. An acquaintance that knew her related to me that on one occasion some visiting African disciples lifted her onto their shoulders out of joy and reverence for her. She was, according to all accounts, very beautiful. Even when she was in her eighties, her inner radiance shone forth, making her seem like a young woman. Jean-Louis Michon, a Swiss architect and Muslim scholar, met Sayyida Fatima in the late 1970s in Beirut. He recounted that the meeting was "marvelous, she was nearly eighty, without a wrinkle. She had a radiant face like a young girl, full of life yet very serene." This account makes one think of the famous Andalusian Sufi Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE), who was taught by an elderly woman saint named Fatima in Cordoba. He related that despite her great age, she possessed the beauty of a young girl. Ibn 'Arabi accorded women a very high spiritual position and saw them as a manifestation of the mercy (*rahma*) of God. He was not the only man in Islam to venerate women in this way. Throughout its history, the Muslim world has known many saintly women, whose *baraka* has survived down to the present. Fatima (d. 632 CE), the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, is one to whom some Muslims turn for intercession. Despite the fact that she was the mother of the Prophet's grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, she was given the honorific title of "virgin" (*batul*) because of her great purity of soul. Fatima al-Yashrutiyya was named after none other than this great woman of early Islam.

Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who was mentioned earlier, is famous throughout the Islamic world as the master of the Sufi path of Love. For Rabi'a, love for God was the motive behind every act, as her most famous and oft-quoted words reveal: "I have not served God from fear of Hell, for I should be like a wretched hireling if I did it from fear. Nor have I served God from love of Paradise, for I should be a bad servant if I served for the sake of what was given. Instead, I have served God only for the love of Him and desire for Him."[3] The love spoken of by Rabi'a is the highest station of Islamic mysticism and is equivalent, in its essence, with the station of gnosis, the intimate knowledge of God. In like manner, Ibn 'Arabi said in a famous poem: "My heart has opened to every form. It is a pasture for gazelles, a cloister for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Ka'ba for the pilgrim, the tables of the Torah and the book of the Qur'an. I practice the religion of Love. In whatsoever direction its caravans advance, the religion of Love shall be my religion and my faith."[4] One could interpret the meaning of love as Rabi'a used it in a similar manner. Thus, it becomes the supreme state of union with the Spirit, where all individuality has melted away and there remains only the consciousness of God in His Essence.

The fact that so many scholars from both East and West came to visit Fatima al-Yashrutiyya during her lifetime demonstrates the importance of her position in the world of Islam and Sufism. Indeed, her education in the disciplines of jurisprudence, theology, and Sufism was unrivalled for a woman of her background. In 1973, she wrote a paper as a contribution to a conference in Houston, Texas, that reflects her status as both a learned scholar and a profound thinker. In it she wrote:

> The salvation of the soul and the attainment of knowledge of God is the legacy of purification. We maintain, therefore, that Sufism is the most noble and excellent of all the sciences because its subject is the knowledge of God, His names, His qualities, and His deeds. While the virtue of acquiring knowledge in all fields is the duty of every Muslim, every branch of knowledge derives its honor from the level of that which it seeks to know and the fruits thereof. The study of the physical world as the handiwork of God Almighty is a natural and noble activity of man. It is obvious that man's finite intellect, if he is on the right path, is drawn by and moves toward the Infinite. Thus, the knowledge of God is more noble and complete than the knowledge of anything else knowable, and the fruits of it lead to felicity in this world and the next. Moreover, the seeker of knowledge is usually affected by that which he seeks, such that gradually his life and soul are molded by the qualities and attributes of the "known." Thus, the knowledge of every attribute of God leads to a spiritual state.[5]

When asked about the vitality of the Yashrutiyya Sufi order at the end of the 1970s, Sayyida Fatima said: "Ours is a materialistic age, but there *are* those who follow the Way. Good men are always in the minority. But that does not matter. Numbers are not what count. One person can be worth more than thousands. Many thousands are not worth one good man."

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FATIMA AL-YASHRUTIYYA

I was born in 1891 and raised in my father's *zawiya*—that of the Shadhiliyya Yashrutiyya in Acre, Palestine. When I was born, my father was 100 years old. This occasion caused much celebration in our house and in the *zawiya,* for my honored father did not have many surviving children. He passed on to the next world when I was just eight years old. There was a woman in our *zawiya* who was thought by all to be a very pious person, so when my mother gave birth to me, my father went to her and said, "I would like you to give me a blessed name for my child, which I have at last been given." She replied, "Is there any name more noble than that of your grandmother and ancestor, *Sayyidatuna* (Our Lady) Fatima al-Zahra', the daughter of the Prophet?" Thus, I was honored with that noble name.

It was always a source of pride and happiness to me that I bore a great physical resemblance to my father. I was given the same shape of face and

cheekbones, similar facial features and nose, and a white complexion. My hands, with their long fingers and fair complexion, are also inherited from him. Anyone who saw me as a child knew that I was the Shaykh's daughter on account of our great likeness. The *zawiya* in Acre was a meeting place for men of learning and law, of Sufism and gnosis. Ever since my eyes first saw the light of day, I found myself living among these learned men and attending study circles, spiritual counsels, and meetings of scholars and jurists. My father favored me and by his kindness to me directed me toward those fields of religious education that emphasized religious sciences and Sufism and that encompassed outward and inward knowledge. For this reason, he allowed me to sit in the circles of Sufi learning where he spoke and which the most learned theologians attended. I began to do this regularly when I was four years old. I was the only child and the only female who devoted herself to lessons of this sort. My father was well aware that he would eventually leave my sister and me alone in the world, so he wanted me to begin my pursuit of knowledge of religion and Sufism, to which my life was to be devoted in the future. This explains the extraordinary attention with which he guided me toward these subjects.

Our life at home in the time of my honored father was one of happiness, lightheartedness, and well-being—a life of simplicity and ease, with few complications. Illuminated by the light of faith and good works, it was a life of learning and mystical striving, of worship and nobility of character. My father was a most holy irradiation of the Divine Essence, endowed with the nature of the Messenger of God, walking in his footsteps through all the stations of outward and inward perfections, not lingering at any one of them, but understanding the truth in all of them. He was heir to the Muhammadan nature in all its perfection, immersed in the overflowing bounty of the divine ocean, and a perfected, divinely inspired guide. He was an example of devotion toward his parents and family, a generous and noble husband, a gentle and kind father, and a man whose humanity encompassed both men and animals with gentleness and mercy. During the course of his life he married four times, but he never had more than one wife at a time. He had a great respect for women and recognized their rights and duties; moreover, he made efforts to raise their level of knowledge and learning. When he married my honored mother, after his former wife had passed away, she was illiterate so he appointed a private tutor for her to teach her to read and write. After her lessons he used to teach her something of Islamic law, Hadith, Sufism, and the like, encouraging her to work and serve God, striving in His path toward perfection. Thus, my mother attained, by her human and spiritual striving, the highest station in relation to the divine.

My father's concern with raising the level of women's spiritual knowledge was not confined to his wives, daughters, and granddaughters alone. In our house, religious lessons were held daily, which were attended only by women. My father used to choose a book and a subject, and ask a woman

teacher named Sayyida Umm Isma'il al-Dimashqi to give the lesson. Often, he would attend the session himself and offer explanations. It was obligatory for all members of our house, as well as those in isolation, visitors, and those living nearby to attend the religious lessons, and it was also obligatory for all the women of our house, even children, to pray five times daily. Every child over the age of seven years had to pray, fast, and recite the litany (*wird*) of the Yashrutiyya Sufi order. We had a special room in our house for chanting verses of the Qur'an, where we went every morning, each with her own copy. One of us would read a portion of the Holy Book aloud; then each would read whatever amount she could accomplish by herself in a voice so low it was almost a whisper, and after this we would all leave to carry out our household duties. A number of women from the important families of neighboring towns used to visit us. One of the first women to receive an initiation from my father was from this group.

The circles of invocation that took place in the *zawiya* were for men only, for my father said, "Circles of invocation are for men, not women." However, this did not mean that women in the *tariqa* were cut off from the practice of invocation. Every year in Ramadan we prayed the extra prayers in our house, with my father assigning for us a leader in prayer. After the night prayer and the voluntary prayers, we women would recite the litanies of the Shadhiliyya Sufi order together and then listen as a part of the Qur'an was recited. The house in which we lived during the life of my father and afterward was not only a place of residence, like other homes, but was also like a mosque, in which the five daily prayers were performed and the Qur'an was read in the intervals. My father lived just as the other disciples did in his home: praying, reciting litanies, and giving himself up to worship and obedience, but in addition he was a guide to lead people toward God. He only ceased reciting the litanies with others after he had passed his hundredth year. My sister Maryam once asked him, "Honored father, do you still recite the litanies at your great age, and in your spiritual station?" He replied, "The Messenger of God used to keep vigil at night until his feet were swollen, even after God had forgiven him his former sins and those that were to come. When he was asked about this, he said, 'Am I not, then, a grateful servant?'" In the same way, my father never ceased to get up at night for prayer and vigil up until the night before he passed on to the Eternal Abode. He spent his time in worship of God night and day, eating and sleeping but little, and living for God and in God. He used to partake of sweetened coffee and tea, and usually stayed in the *takıya,* only returning to the house to eat and sleep.[6] At times he ate with his disciples, for he spent most of his time with them, and he prayed the dawn prayer with them in the mosque behind the *imam* (leader of the communal prayer). When he passed his 100th year, he began to pray in his room, and then go down to the *takıya* (Prayer Hall), as was his custom. He used to enjoy walking in the fresh air and would pay visits to the tomb of the Prophet Salih or to the tomb of a saintly man of the area.[7]

We used to sleep with my father in one room. He was very kind to us and treated us with the gentlest of fatherly care and the greatest tenderness. He was concerned with the circumstances of all the women in the house along with the servants and tried to make them happy if possible. It is certain that the women among his disciples who attained realization and knowledge of God and His Messenger—those to whom God gave victory and aid from His Messenger—were so many that there is not space here to write all of their names. Suffice it to say that my honored father declared that in the city of Safad (Safed in present-day Israel) alone, there were 40 women who had realized God.

My sister Maryam was born two years after me, at the beginning of 1893. We lived under the care of my father and mother when we were children, then under the care of my mother after my father departed to Paradise, and then together after my mother died, until Maryam left this world to meet her Lord in 1975. When Maryam was a small child, no more than one year old, she used to hear the voice of the *muezzin* making the call to prayer, "God is most great! God is most great!" Whenever she heard him, she would raise her hands over her head and say "*Allahu Akbar!*" meaning, "God is most great!"

My sister was this way in all aspects of her life. When she reached the age of six, she began to show signs of traveling on the Path. My mother told me that after getting into bed and going to sleep, my sister used to wake up every night, sit up in her bed, look around her, and ask, "What is the explanation of such and such a verse from such and such a Sura of the Qur'an?" The women in the room would awaken, awestruck, and say nothing. Then my sister would begin explaining the verse and her explanation would be correct, according to those who heard her. Next she would ask those present, "What is the meaning of such and such a hadith?" Again, the women were silent in amazement. My sister would then give the explanation of the hadith, what happened in it, and its chain of transmission. She would remain doing this for some time, until sleep once more overcame her. The next morning, those who had heard her would ask her about what had happened the previous night, but she knew nothing of what she had done and it was as though she had experienced nothing unusual. She continued this way for four months, and eventually my mother became very upset and often wept for her. Finally, she decided to ask my sister what she saw when she was in that state. One night after my sister had gone to sleep, she awoke, sat up, and began explaining verses of the Qur'an. Those who were present asked her what she saw, and she said, "She sees before her wide, green fields in which there are many people listening to her, and at her side is a man carrying a wreath radiant with light, which he wishes to place on her head." My mother said to her, "Tell them, 'My mother is sad, she does not want this for me, but wants me to be as I am in the daytime. She pleads with you and asks God for help so that you help her.'" My sister began to repeat this. The wish was repeated

for 10 nights until God accepted my mother's desire and my sister ceased to have these experiences. God the glorious had brought her back from the station of inebriation (*sukr*) to that of perfect sobriety (*sahw*). My sister combined both the beautiful and the majestic in her character, and was the embodiment of mercy. She ascended the ladder of the Path with humility through all of the stations, witnessing and unveiling the Truth, for she resembled our father both outwardly and inwardly.

My father used to sit and devote himself to the prolonged invocation of the name of God while facing the direction of Mecca. At these times, I often sat next to him, for I wished to see him in this state. The special circumstances in my life seldom permitted me to play with other children of my age. This did not upset me, however, for I felt happy and proud to sit with the learned men before my honored father, attending his lessons. Of course, I was not completely prevented from having close friends who were dear to me during my childhood. My father was kind to them too; he treated them with gentleness and told me to behave with kindness toward them.

Once, when I was six years old, I asked my mother, "Who created me?" "God," she answered. "And who created you?" I asked. "God," she said. "And who created my father?" "God." "And who created our Prophet Muhammad?" "God," she said. "And who created God?" "No one created Him," she said. "He has always existed, even before creating us." "How was He before He created us?" I asked, and she said, "Ask your father." At that moment he was sitting in the same room as us, and was reciting the litany, rosary in hand. I stood before him, kissed his hand, and repeated to him what I had said to my mother. Whenever I asked him about anything, he gave me a complete answer, as though one of his senior disciples were asking the question. When I asked him my question as I had done to my mother, he looked at me, smiling, and repeated the tradition of the Prophet as follows: "[God] was in darkness. Beneath Him was air and above Him was air, and He created His Throne upon the water." Then he closed his eyes, completely absorbed, and continued narrating the tradition, his hands resting on his knees.

I was very intimately linked with my father. I accompanied him physically and spiritually wherever he was, whether at home, in the *takıya,* in the prayer room, or in towns and villages. I remember how he used to go to the Friday prayer and to the two feast day (*'Id*) prayers accompanied by large groups of disciples. I remember how I used to go with him, never parting from him, saying the prayer behind the *imam* along with the others. At times, I went up with Hajj Salim, who was one of my father's disciples, to the roof of the mosque to pray with the men who gave the call to prayer. One of the dearest memories I have of my childhood is of a dream I had one night while asleep in my bed. I saw the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) lying very still, asleep in my father's bed. Upon seeing him, I was seized with a great fear and began to cry and shout out: "O my father! O my lord, O my master, O my grandfather, O my beloved, O Messenger of God!"

At this he opened his eyes, and looked at me, smiling. Then he sat up in the bed, drew me to him, and held me to his noble chest, blessing me, and I could feel his breaths entering with mine into my breast. The next morning, when I told my father of the vision I had, his eyes filled with tears and he wept from joy, saying to me, "God will give you victory, my daughter, by the grace of those pure, noble breaths."

On another night, I once again had a vision while asleep, and when I awoke in the morning, I set off to look for my father to tell him of it. I found him that day standing with a group of visiting disciples outside the door to the great hall of the *zawiya*. I approached him and said, "O my lord! I saw in my sleep that I was standing before the gate of Paradise. The guardian angel opened the gate, and called to me, saying, 'Enter.' 'I will not enter,' I said. 'Why?' he asked. 'I will not enter until my father's disciple Hajj Salim Baliq enters.' 'Then let him enter,' the Summoning Angel said. Still I remained where I was and did not enter. I heard the Summoning Angel say a second time, 'Enter.' I replied, 'I will not enter.' 'Why?' he asked. 'I will only enter when all of our brethren have entered,' I said, and he replied, 'Then let them enter.' It was then that I awoke." When my father heard this, his eyes were filled with tears, and I heard him say to our brethren, "My daughter Fatima is a true disciple, for she loves all of the brethren on the Path. May my Lord grant her victory!"

On the 16th night of Ramadan, in the year 1316 of the Hijra (January 28, 1899), my father said his obligatory prayers, then stayed awake and kept vigil for half the night in spite of being 108 years old at the time. He then retired to his bed, which was in the same room in which he worshiped. There, in perfect repose and silence, he left this world to meet his Lord just before dawn. He was one who pleased God and whose soul was in peace, for he possessed confidence in God to the greatest possible degree and had spent his entire life in the service of the primordial (*hanif*) religion by guiding aspirants and spreading the teachings of Sufism far and wide. My relationship with my father was founded upon veneration, respect, and great spiritual love. Because of this love, which filled all my thoughts and my heart, I am helpless to describe here the extent of the grief and pain I felt upon his passing to the everlasting Paradise. From the moment the news of his death reached my ears, I felt as though I had fallen from heaven down to earth. I left our house and went to the *zawiya,* wandering without knowing where I was going. It is true, of course, that I was only eight years old when my father passed away, but whoever had lived as I had lived, in his shadow and among the most eminent leaders in thought and learning, and whoever had enjoyed guidance such as his would no doubt have experienced the events and changes that came to pass not as a small child, but as an adult possessed of a fully mature mind. I can remember that on the third day after my father passed away, I was afflicted with an illness that confined me to my bed as a result of my extreme grief and pain. While, in bed I picked up the Qur'an

and began reading *Surat al-Kahf* (Qur'an 18, The Cave). I came to the verse that says, "And their father had been righteous, and thy Lord intended that they should come to their full strength and should bring forth their treasure as a mercy from their Lord" (Qur'an 18:82). Upon reading this verse, I felt a great peace entering my soul, bringing rest to my mind and calm to my wounded heart. I realized at that moment that God, Glorious and Most High, would not forsake me, and that my father's care for me ever since I came into this world was clear proof that God had taken my hand and would guide my footsteps and illuminate my heart so that I would be shown what was best for me in my religious and worldly life.

I was afraid that after my father's death I would lose the opportunity to attend meetings of scholars and doctors of the law and that I could no longer go to the study circles that were attended by scholars and Sufis who came from various parts of the city and from distant towns to hear my father's discourses, explanations, and interpretations. Fortunately, however, my link with these learned men was not broken at all after his death; in fact, they became even kinder to my sister and me. The bonds between us were strengthened and the roots of our relationship deepened and remained strong throughout my life. Such friendship had a great impact upon me and was to influence the formation of my character. As the Shadhili master Taj al-Din Ibn 'Ata'illah al-Iskandari (d. 1309 CE) said in his *Kitab al-Hikam* (Book of Aphorisms): "Do not befriend one whose state does not inspire you, or whose words do not lead you to God." This was the direction toward which my father had led me and which he wished me to follow. Without doubt, it was my mother who helped the most to nurture the growth of the Sufi spirit in my sister and me after my father's departure from this earthly life. She always urged us to practice what our father had desired of us. Among the things that helped us realize this goal were a library at the *zawiya* that contained precious and valuable books and my father's private library in our house. Although I was still very young, I decided to try to read many of the books in these libraries, so that through their instruction I might obtain of my father's teaching what I otherwise would have missed.

I asked my mother for permission to veil myself in front of the great scholars and the male disciples of my father. She consulted with my brother Ibrahim and with the scholars and brethren that we knew, but they all agreed that I should not be permitted to use the veil when I was with them. She did permit me, however, to dress as I had done in the days of my father, and meet these men in our house wearing a wide, white prayer scarf on my head. In the street, I went veiled like the rest of the young ladies of the day, for in that time this practice was observed most strictly.

I cannot be certain at what point in my life I learned to write. Moreover, I do not remember sitting before a teacher and learning writing from him, and I cannot recall the first time I ever picked up a pen. All I can remember is that I wanted to learn to write ever since I began to understand the nature

of things. After my father's death I used to see Hajj Salim writing letters to his family. I would take one of these letters, put a thin piece of paper over it, and trace onto it what he had written in his letter. He would watch me doing this, and after some weeks he asked me, "What are you doing, mistress?" "I am drawing the word on the thin paper," I replied. "I am just playing with it." He said, "Are you able to understand the meaning of the words you are writing?" "Yes," I said. "Have you forgotten that I have completed the Qur'an and know some of its verses by heart?" He said, "Then read what you have written." So I read it, and he said, "Now I will write a line for you and you copy it out for me." So I tried and succeeded in copying the line of words without using the thin paper. Hajj Salim went on teaching me to write in this way, and that is why my handwriting resembles Hajj Salim's. I remember that after I wrote the first line, Hajj Salim went to tell the good news to my mother, saying, "My lady, little Fatima has learned to write by herself through the blessing of her father!" My mother was very happy at this, as was everyone else in the house at that time.

The home in which a child is raised has a great and lasting influence on her and determines to a large degree the formation of her personality. I remember my sister 'A'isha, the firstborn of my father, when she was about 90 years old. I never saw her without a book in her hand. In her free time, she used to see to her religious duties, reciting the litanies and invoking the name of God. After this, she spent most of her time reading books. She not only read religious works on theology and Sufism, but also books on history, literature, and ancient and modern poetry. She was very happy to see me at the age of nine or ten, with so much determination, working hard to read as much as possible to increase myself in wisdom and learning. My mother feared that I read too much, especially during my severe bouts of asthma, but my sister 'A'isha used to say to her, "Let her read. She will attain greatness in society and in the Sufi Way, if God Most High wills. This strong motivation to acquire knowledge, even when she is just a young child, has to manifest itself somehow in the world. My sister will obtain what she desires, with God's permission." In my father's *zawiya* there were a number of Qur'an reciters who knew the Holy Book by heart and who were well known for their beautiful voices. I grew up loving to listen to the recitation of verses of the Wise Book and to hear the songs and rhymed poems that were composed by the Sufis of our Yashrutiyya Tariqa. In this way, I memorized many verses of the Qur'an as well as Sufi songs and poems, and I began to acquire a taste for the arts, poetry, and music in an age in which there were no radios, televisions, or tape recorders.

As I entered my adolescence, God granted me recovery from my asthma, from which I had suffered constantly for 10 years. However, because of my prolonged illness, I never regained a strong constitution and was in need of care and supervision for the rest of my life with respect to food, rest, and social activities. The doctors had advised for my benefit that we spend time

in coastal and inland areas, and in lowlands and mountains so as to have a periodic change of climate. Therefore, we would journey each year in the spring and summer to the mountains of Palestine, Lebanon, and Damascus. We continued in this way until war broke out in western Libya, waged by the Italians who had first brought their troops into Beirut but were defeated by the Ottoman Turkish army. During this time, it was dangerous to remain near the coast. Everyone living in such areas was anxious, especially in the city of Acre, which was still a fortified town of military importance. Many of the inhabitants of the city left to live in nearby villages and mountain areas, fearing an attack by the Italians. After passing a few weeks with our family in fear and apprehension, we decided that there was no alternative but to follow the course of the other citizens of Acre. We asked leave of my brother Ibrahim, and then went with my mother, my sister Maryam, and my cousins Anisa and ʻAbda to the *zawiya* in the mountain village of Tarshiha, 24 kilometers northeast of Acre. It was cold up in the mountains and the village sometimes even had snow in the winter. When we went there it was the beginning of March, and we traveled over a rough, unpaved road. We stayed in Tarshiha for three months and during this period my health became worse and I suffered a relapse because of the cold weather. Added to this was the fact that I did not like living in this village, for I had too many fond memories of spending the summer months there with my father, and receiving huge groups of visitors from various parts of Syria who came to seek his counsel. Were it not for the Italian war (that is, World War I), which forced me to stay there for three months, I would have preferred to go to the mountains of Lebanon.

Whenever we went on our seasonal trips, my father's disciples would welcome us with joy and celebration and show great affection toward us. This was a reminder to us that they remained devoted and full of love for my father, adhering to his teachings and directions in spite of his passing away to the next world. Throughout our lives our mother never forbade us anything that gave us pleasure, provided it was in conformity with the Noble Path of the Sufi order and the accomplishment of God's commands. We were, may God be praised, objects of trust, esteem, and respect for whomever we met, whether they were disciples of my father or acquaintances from outside the Yashrutiyya order.

Life in Acre was unsettled after the establishment of the "Nation of Unity and Progress" in Turkey.[8] I used to spend a few weeks at a time in Acre and then go to Haifa, alternating between the two. In the spring we often went to Sidon in Lebanon or Damascus, or took an excursion in Palestine. People in our country had joined forces four months before the declaration of war by the Ottoman government on the Allies in 1914. At that time, I was suffering from gastric fever, so my mother decided that we should stay in Damascus for the duration of the war. My mother and sisters waited for me to recover, and when I had partially overcome my sickness but was still feeling weak,

we prepared to leave Acre. However, we could not find any carriage or animals to take us to the train station, which lay outside of Acre, because the Ottoman army had taken possession of all means of transportation in the region. I was still too weak to go by foot from our house in the old city to the train station, so my cousin Sidi Hasan carried me there in his arms. We were very sad to leave the city that housed the remains of my father. However, at that time we did not think that we would be kept away for long, and hoped that we would surely be able to return to our beloved city one day. My mother, my sister Maryam, and my cousin Anisa traveled with me, while my brother Ibrahim remained in Acre with his family, along with my cousin Sidi Hasan.

The war caused poverty, hunger, destruction, disease, and the death of multitudes of people. Even though in World War I our country did not become very involved with the armies engaged in battle, our people suffered deeply from the hardships that resulted from it. The Arab regions of Syria were swept by a wave of typhoid fever at that time, and I remember during my stay in Damascus that there was severe hunger that grew worse every day, especially during the last two years of the war. It became a common sight to see men starve and die in the streets, and whenever we went out of the house we saw men, women, and children in distress crying, "We are hungry! We are hungry!"

While I was in Damascus in my youth, I would receive scholars, doctors of the law, and learned men of that city, and during the war, others who had fled from Acre to Damascus. When I met with them I wore the complete veil according to the Shari'a. My presence in Damascus during that period, and my freedom in the realm of the law and the arts, afforded me a precious opportunity. Because I had become acquainted with many of the learned men of that time, I was able to broaden my understanding and deepen my knowledge of diverse subjects. I developed a strong and independent personality that has endured throughout my life. It was my great good fortune to be able to take advantage of the opportunity to live in Damascus, for it was in those days an important center of Islamic scholarship.

Following the end of World War I, with its grief and misery, people throughout the country once more felt safe and returned to their normal way of life, going back to the homes that they had fled. We too returned to our home in Acre and took up our permanent residence there as before the war. From time to time, we would take trips to Damascus or Lebanon to visit friends or for a vacation, and then return to our home. In addition, we often spent the winter months in Cairo, which was a major center of religion, law, literature, and the arts. The first time we went there was in 1920, just after the war. We traveled by train from Palestine and were some of the first women to go to Egypt following the war. During our stay in Cairo, we rented a house in the new part of the city, which was at that time no more than a small village. The house that we found for ourselves there became like

a miniature *zawiya,* for we met there with other disciples of my father as well as with scholars and literary men. The situation was similar for my female companions. We occupied ourselves with reading both classic and contemporary works, books translated from other languages, as well as literary and scholastic journals, and when we met we would discuss our readings. The majority of my companions were gifted women with literary and writing abilities. Some of them were poets and members of the highest ranks of the women's revival movement in Egypt.

In the years following the war, the eyes of the people were opened to the true nature of what had happened to them. Revolution came to Egypt in the time of Sa'd Zaghlul (d. 1927), followed by revolution in Damascus and other regions of Syria, and hints of revolution in Palestine as well.[9] Thus, we did not feel settled no matter where we were. There was then a manifest need for women to be more visible in order for them to participate in the organization and planning of Arab society. In spite of this ambience, I always tended toward a Sufi perspective. This was not surprising, for I saw myself first as a worshipper of God, the Majestic and Powerful, through my journeying on the Straight Path and through my love for knowledge, realization, and learning. My father was my master and guide, and I made great efforts to guard the filial and spiritual link with him. I had certain physical weaknesses in those early days, which gave rise to the illnesses that afflicted me my health, and which called for special attention. I have lived a fragile life, one in which my schedule of eating, sleeping, and meeting with visitors have always been regulated. Thus, I was never able to live in a town cut off from contact with the outside world, or in one where there were no doctors and medicines available, in spite of my attraction to and love for the beauty of nature.

I kept company only with people of learning, mystical knowledge, and the arts. This was not out of any egoism or pride on my part, but because I had sat among such people since I was a child, and the valuable lessons I learned in those meetings on all aspects of knowledge had given rise to this tendency in my soul. I was drawn to these worthy scholars and felt a desire deep within my heart to be where they were. This compelled me to return time and again to the cities of Damascus and Cairo, for it was in these important centers of learning that such scholars were to be found. I was strict with myself, keeping watch over my soul to the extreme limit of conservatism; I never for one day interrupted my prayers or reciting the litanies, even when I was traveling to Cairo, Damascus, or Lebanon, and I set aside times when I went into seclusion to invoke God's name. In these moments, I felt a peace that I cannot describe adequately in words, except to say my soul was engulfed by a most profound feeling of contentment. This was indeed the station of worship (*'ibada*) of God the Creator, the One. He said, "Worship thy Lord until certitude cometh to thee" (Qur'an 15:99).

In another part of my life at this time I had women friends, the daughters of elite families who had an appreciation for the arts. We used to meet

together for singing, socializing, and to discuss various subjects. We would listen to the songs of women who were blessed with beautiful voices, or had skill in rendering a piece of music according to its proper rhythm and melody. In this way, I passed the period after World War I.

I did not forget to worship and persevere in Sufi practices, but at the same time I did not cut myself off from the social world that surrounded me and of which I was a part. My relations with many of the great scholars and saintly people were strengthened, and by the grace of God I was confident and secure in all that I did at that time. It is well known to those familiar with history that the Palestinian revolution raged fiercest in the year 1936, and during that year there was great violence, fighting, and rioting. It was a year that was different from the rest of the years of the revolution and was therefore called the ''Revolution of '36.'' The general history of this affair I leave to historians, and will only include what happened to my family and me during this period, which went on for nearly three years, and which lasted until just before the breakout of World War II in 1939.

When the revolution of 1936 broke out, I was recovering from a bout of dysentery, which had previously afflicted me two years earlier. At the time I came down with it, it took a great toll on me, for I already had a weak constitution due to the asthma that I had suffered from in my youth. This illness caused me a great deal of discomfort and pain, and my overall health was very slow to improve. At that time, I was still living with my mother and sister in Acre, and when my mother saw that my health was not improving at all, she decided that we should go to Beirut and seek the advice of well-known doctors there. She was also motivated by the events taking place in Palestine at that time. We left for Beirut in the beginning of 1935 and rented a house there. Thus, when the worst of the Palestinian revolution came in 1936, I was in Beirut recovering from my illness. It was necessary for me to watch over my health carefully for a few years before I regained my strength, and even then I was delicate and susceptible to further bouts of sickness for a long time. Both my stay in Beirut, a city of learning and intellectualism, and my confinement to my house encouraged me to read a great deal about various subjects. I benefited from learning more about various ideas and views in different fields. This stay also enabled me to meet with several philosophers and scholars, either through their visits to our house or by attending their lectures, if my health permitted. Thus, in this period I was able to increase my store of knowledge, particularly in the domain of philosophy and in the realm of Sufism.

After we had spent nearly three years in Beirut during the period of the Palestinian revolution, World War II was declared in 1939. A few weeks later, we left Beirut and moved to Damascus, but after two months returned to Lebanon. It had become clear to us that we could not stay in Damascus during winter, as it was extremely cold, and my mother was no longer young and needed to see the doctors in Beirut with whom she was accustomed and

who were familiar with the details of her health. Thus, we stayed for the summer in the city of Aliya in the mountains of Lebanon and stayed for the winter months in Beirut on the coast. In spring we would travel either to Acre or to Damascus, depending upon the conditions of transportation at the time. Days, months, and years passed in this way, traveling from one city to another and hoping to be able to return to our country and live in Acre after the war.

At the end of the third year of the war, I sat down one day to write some letters. However, without intending to do so, I wrote a discourse on Sufism of over seven pages in length. I was amazed at what I had done, and felt that a spirit, or rather a hidden voice, had urged me to write about the Path and about my father and his Sufi message. The moment I finished writing these pages I hastened to show them to my mother, who encouraged me, saying, "Do as you are ordered. This is a fruit of the blessing your father bestowed upon you." I remembered then that my friends who were doctors of the law and scholars had asked me to write a book that would relate the story of my father's life, his deeds, and his message. I knew then that the duty of writing this book had fallen to me, and that I would confirm what had come to pass in my father's life and tell of the grace God had bestowed upon him.

Thus, I began to write my first book, which is titled *A Journey Toward the Truth*. This work begins with an introduction to Sufi doctrine, followed by a description of my father's doctrine, his life and influence on Sufism, and something about the Shadhiliyya Sufi order. I remember that when writing some of the chapters of this book, it was necessary for me to refer to some of the books of the Sufi masters. In spite of my complete faith in the sanctity of Shaykh Ibn 'Arabi (may God be pleased with him), I neglected to make use of his valuable works, for I thought, "Shaykh Muhyiddin has some enemies, and I do not want to open the door of dispute by referring to him." From the moment this thought passed through my mind, I was no longer able to continue writing; my hand was paralyzed for three years, unable to complete the work without knowing why. Then one day a woman disciple from Damascus came to visit us in Beirut, and during her stay she saw my father in her sleep. She kissed his hand in her vision and asked him why I had stopped writing. He answered, saying, "Because Fatima has shut the door upon Shaykh Muhyiddin, may God be pleased with him." The next morning, this disciple related her vision to me. I asked forgiveness of God and repented of my erroneous thoughts. Then I hastened to the books of Shaykh Muhyiddin and began to read them and absorb their wisdom. During my study of his works, I came across a poem that he wrote called "Journey to the Truth" (*Rihla ila al-Haqq*). This title pleased me, so I gave it to my book as well, guided by Shaykh Muhyiddin's example. The writing of my first book took just under 14 years to complete. I wrote down what came to me in humility and devotion, telling of the graces that our Sufi order enjoyed.

I only wrote when I felt composed in the depths of my soul. Then I would seclude myself in my room to record my memories and write about what I had learned of Sufism.

After the end of the Second World War, we decided to remain living in Beirut, as we had grown accustomed to life there and it had become an absolute necessity to have a doctor nearby, especially for my mother. However, we still used to visit our home in Acre once or twice a year for a few weeks during spring or autumn. We remained in Beirut until the great Palestinian disaster of 1948, when we were compelled along with most other Palestinians to flee from our homes, an emigration from which we have not been able to return to this day.[10]

My new permanent residence in Beirut afforded me the opportunity to continue pursuing intellectual activities in spite of my delicate health, for this city was and still is one of the most important centers of learning and thought in the Arab world. The existence of several universities, along with the freedom of thought, speech, and publishing that existed there, encouraged diverse views and beliefs to manifest themselves and interact with each other, through the media of newspapers, magazines, and books, or in lectures and debates. Life in Beirut differed from that of other Arab countries, for groups of people from different nations and regions had immigrated there, and each of these groups had its own customs, traditions, and ways of thinking. Thus, if one experiences life in Beirut he will not be able to decide whether he is in an Oriental or a Western country, so distinct and peculiar is its character. However, the absolute and unrestricted freedom of thought, speech, and action can reach a point of near chaos. There were those in this beautiful city who advocated the adoption of Western urbanization wholesale, while another, more moderate group called for people to learn from the West, but to keep their Arab heritage—in other words, to blend Oriental and Western modes of thought. There were others who were conservative and did not believe in importing anything from the West. They wished to retain the philosophy and customs of the traditional world and to revive that which had been forgotten or had fallen into disuse. This era of the Palestinian emigration has been the longest period of my life, extending over more than 30 years. It began in 1948, and continues to this day at the end of 1978, as I write this chapter of my memoir. Only God knows how long this situation of exile will continue. From the start of this period, we have been living in Beirut, so from the point of view of daily life these years can be seen simply as a continuation of our life there.

Nothing changed for me during this time, and I continued to work on my book until it was completed in 1954. In April of that year, my mother left this world—may God have mercy on her—after having suffered a great deal from illnesses and having spent her whole life caring for us and serving the disciples of the *Tariqa*.

THE ZAWIYA OF THE YASHRUTIYYA IN MY FATHER'S TIME

The *zawiya* is a place where religious rites are performed. It is a place for prayer, fasting, night vigil, reflection, invocation, meditation, and total concentration on God. It is there that the litanies are recited, circles of *dhikr* (invocation) are held, and the disciple (*faqir,* literally ''poor one'') cuts himself off from anything other than God, the Glorious. It is in the *zawiya* that knowledge of God and realization are sought, where union with God, the Mighty and Majestic, is witnessed and realized, and where the disciple is extinguished in love of God and His Messenger. The *takıya* is the great sanctuary of the *zawiya,* with a high dome, in which the five daily prayers and sessions of *dhikr* are held. There are in addition many rooms in the *zawiya* to house visitors during their stay and for those disciples who are in retreat from the world. Then there are the small houses in which the families of those in retreat live. There are special sections for the old and sick, for the poor followers of the Path, and one house set apart for women. The Shaykh's house was in the vicinity of the *zawiya,* where he lived with his wife and children. The greatness of the *zawiya* was due not to the beauty and grandeur of its outward appearance, but to the great saintliness of its Shaykh and his divine station, for he was filled by God with mystical secrets and lights, and with knowledge and understanding.

This was how our *zawiya* was in my honored father's time: The spiritual life there was sweet with worship, remembrance, mysteries, and divine illuminations. Winds of grace and holiness swept through the realms of religious learning, both outwardly and inwardly, during the meetings of *dhikr,* in lessons of literature and the arts, during meditation, and in singing spiritual songs. This holy breeze wafted throughout the atmosphere of the Sufi, for although Islamic learning has many aspects, it is in essence a spiritual education that can be reduced to the acts of worship and remembrance of God. Every evening, study circles were held in our *zawiya* where lessons of Islamic Law, Hadith, Qur'an commentary, and Sufism were taught as well as other aspects of the sciences of the outer law and inner truth. In those days, the *zawiya* resembled an institute of learning that was attended by various groups of people, not only for the purpose of following a spiritual path and seeking enlightenment, but also to benefit from the sacred spring of wisdom, each to the extent of his desire and need for religious education and spiritual direction.

Adherents of both exoteric and esoteric knowledge attended the sessions of *dhikr*. They included men of authority, the rich, and the poor. Sometimes it happened that a person could not find a place to sit in that great sanctuary on account of the multitude of people who used to come to listen to our Shaykh. My honored father performed the five daily prayers in the *takıya* along with his representatives (sing. *muqaddam*), elder disciples, visitors, disciples in retreat, and those living nearby, who also came to pray with

him. The great number of visitors to the *zawiya* filled one with awe and reverence. The rows of men at prayer were often so numerous that they even overflowed into the outer hallways of the mosque. The practice of invocation is mentioned clearly in several places in the Qur'an, such as in the following verses: "Remember God with much remembrance, and glorify Him morning and evening" (Qur'an 33:41–42); ". . . Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides" (Qur'an 3:191); and "Is it not in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace?" (Qur'an 13:28). There are also many *ahadith* that speak of the right to invoke and to hold sessions of *dhikr*. Of these, the following was transmitted by Tirmidhi: "The Messenger of God said: 'Whenever you pass by the meadows of Paradise, graze therein.' They asked, 'O Messenger of God, what are the meadows of Paradise?' He replied, 'The circles of *dhikr*.'" The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also said: "Verily God has angels who travel about seeking out the circles of *dhikr*, and whenever they come upon one, they surround it and God says to them, 'Enfold them in My mercy, for they are of those who sit together (to invoke) and whose sitting thusly will not cause them sorrow.'"

The Sufi disciple who is attached to God's path may be in isolation from the world, or he may work and earn his living as others do. The one in isolation must cut himself off from that which is apart from God, and devote himself completely to Him. The other, for his part, enters the Path while continuing in his outward life, working to earn his living and performing his worldly duties. In this respect, disciples are divided into two groups, yet they are all united in a common path under the direction of a realized Shaykh who has been given the authority to guide. For the aspirant who follows a spiritual path under a perfected Shaykh, all of his experiences and states exist only as a reflection of those of his master, and come about by means of him. This is what is meant when it is said that the Sufi state of extinction (*fana'*) is divided into three stages: The first extinction is in the Shaykh, the second extinction is in the Muhammadan Essence, and the third extinction is in God, the Mighty and Exalted. The attainment of the second level of extinction should not sever the fundamental link between the disciple and his Shaykh, for the successful and joyful disciple is he who never forgets his master, regardless of his spiritual state or station. Those who work in the world are divided into three subcategories: first, those who earn their livelihood in their own countries and who come to visit their Shaykh and return home again; second, those who work and live in the town near the *zawiya;* and third, those who emigrate from their country in order to be near their Shaykh or to find work for themselves in the nearby town.

Those who have been placed by their Lord, the Glorified and Most High, in the station of isolation from the world (*khalwa*) live in the *zawiya* near the master. Having devoted themselves to God in this way, they no longer turn toward the world. There were a great number of these disciples in our

zawiya, men who came from all social classes and ethnic origins. Among them were Arabs, Turks, Moroccans, Indians, Persians, and Sudanese. These disciples were outwardly and inwardly brethren in God: men who conformed to the Muhammadan Sunna in order to purify their souls and polish their characters, to efface their lower selves, and become immersed in the consciousness of the essence of God Most High.

Advancement on the path of the Sufi masters is not obtained by holding circles of *dhikr* openly, for this is something that everyone owes to God. Rather, it is obtained by practicing the remembrance of God in secret through repeating the Supreme Name, *Allah.* This is the second pillar of the Path of the Masters of the Shadhiliyya, the first being the existence of a realized and perfected Shaykh, for without him the one who practices remembrance (*dhikr*) would not be able to attain the peace and fulfillment contained in the invocation. The disciple who wishes to practice the invocation should choose a peaceful, quiet place, during the night or the day, but more often at night, where he can sit to remember God, with knees either drawn up, as a sign of humility, or cross-legged and in both cases wrapped in a cloak. It was related that the Prophet Muhammad used to sit with his knees drawn up, holding a garment wrapped around him. The most important invocation is the invocation of the Supreme Name, *Allah.* Without this Name, no victory will come to the aspirant, nor will he attain to the station of sainthood save by invoking it. Moreover, he cannot truly invoke unless he cuts himself off from everything other than the One Invoked.

The Shadhiliyya Sufi method is founded on the Holy Book and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, the search for knowledge, and the frequent practice of invocation in an attitude of worshipfulness and consciousness of the divine. This means of calling upon God is the easiest and most direct of spiritual paths, for it does not entail great hardship or much strenuous effort. The primordial light lying dormant within the soul gains strength through the light of knowledge and through the light of invocation, so that the soul is rid of its defects and impurities. It can then draw nearer to the Divine Presence until it is completely absorbed and the invocation burns away all thoughts of anything other than the One Invoked.

People are often heard to say that the occupants of Sufi dwellings live a life of indolence and ease, but in our *zawiya* it was not thus. Each disciple had duties that he performed to the best of his ability, depending on his preparation and education. These duties were not a burden for him, but were part of life in the *zawiya* and were done in an attitude of friendship and affection toward others. All of the disciples were equal before God; the wise and learned taught the illiterate and the common man, striving to teach the doctrinal knowledge that makes the Muhammadan initiation accessible to him. The strong dealt gently with the weak, and the elevated man gave guidance to his humbler brother.

The Shaykh appoints a representative (*muqaddam*) in the *zawiya,* who is authorized to initiate others into the Yashrutiyya order, to educate disciples, to lead the sessions of *dhikr,* and to teach religious studies. This representative must be someone who is well educated and eloquent, possessed of an excellent character, and endowed with wisdom and understanding. He must combine in his person knowledge of both legal and spiritual matters. He could be chosen either from those who live in isolation from the world or from those working in the world, for neither is more worthy than the other for this position. Concern for health and cleanliness was of the greatest importance in our *zawiya,* indeed to a degree that surpasses description. If my honored father fell ill, the doctor was summoned immediately, and thus it was with his wife and family or any of his disciples. If someone needed to be under a doctor's supervision, he was sent to the hospital in Acre. If he had to undergo surgery in one of the bigger hospitals in Beirut, he was sent there. If he needed a change of climate he went to the mountains, and whenever someone was afflicted with an infectious disease he was isolated from the rest of the disciples. Thus, in spite of the great numbers of visitors, whether nomads or settled folk, the concern for health and cleanliness was paramount. In reality, life in our *zawiya* was not like the life of dervishes, but instead was a life of spiritual progress combining invocation, learning, worship, and realization. Through carrying out our human duties and diligently striving to attain the levels of perfection—and by this last I mean the spiritual stations—one could arrive at the station of proximity to God Most High.

Our *zawiya* offered food to visiting disciples, and we often had no less than 400 or 500 visitors every day, apart from those living there in retreat with their wives and children. These visitors stayed in the *zawiya* and at mealtimes the tablecloths were laid and the disciples sat in groups to eat, while some helped to serve, carrying jugs of water and singing spiritual songs. During the feast days the number of visitors could reach between 1,000 and 2,000 each day. Whatever money accrued from religious charities was spent on the *zawiya,* as well as any other money and gifts the disciples offered to it. The Shaykh's money, when he had any, was also spent on the *zawiya* and thus everyone participated in its upkeep. If the *zawiya* happened to own some farmland or olive groves, farmers who were in retreat would cultivate it, till it, gather the harvest, pick the fruit, and put the olives in a press to extract the oil. They also worked at transporting provisions and raising livestock. Some worked at weaving clothing, combing cotton from the beds, buying necessities from the market, sweeping, cleaning, polishing, and whatever else was necessary for the maintenance of the *zawiya.*

The majority of those in retreat in our *zawiya* in my father's time were from elite and very old families. My father used to exhort them to give wholehearted devotion to their spiritual practices and to extinguish themselves in the love of God and His Messenger. He treated them as a father would his children, never differentiating between them and my

brother Sidi Muhyiddin. In fact, he often said, "If Muhyiddin were not a disciple, I would not be disposed to love him." My brother Sidi Ibrahim came from Tunis, bringing his wife and children after the death of our brother Muhyiddin. Although at that time our master had no male children other than Sidi Ibrahim, he ordered him to follow the Path as if he were in isolation from the world for some years along with the other disciples before coming to live in his father's house. Sidi Ibrahim slept with the disciples and assisted them by helping to construct buildings, carrying clay with his hands, and wearing dyed linen garments. My sister's son Sidi Hasan led the same life. Our brother in God Sidi Mahmud al-Lahham related the following account from his brother Sidi 'Abdallah—both of them were sons of the great Shaykh Muhyiddin al-Lahham: "We were in the *zawiya* and heard news of the arrival of Sidi Ibrahim, the son of our great master, in Haifa. I was with a group of our disciples from Damascus, and we all decided to go to Haifa and take the rest of the disciples to the *zawiya* to welcome him. Now our Shaykh was nearby and when he saw our group he said, 'Do not behave with Sidi Ibrahim as the disciples of Shaykh So-and-So behave with his sons; they pamper and entertain them and dress them in silk. As a result, the children start to walk about and look at themselves and become cut off from closeness to God.' So we remained in the *zawiya*, and not one of us went to welcome the Shaykh's son. He came with his family and entered the *zawiya* unaccompanied." My father also said to some disciples after my brother's arrival in Acre, "Leave him to be taught by the members of our order." Our Shaykh was ascetic in the true sense of the word. He avoided the things of this world in spite of the fact that he was always being offered them. If he were given something he would spend it in God's name.

The disciples were extinguished in their love for their master, and preferred a life of isolation to that of work in the world so they could be near him at all times. However, the Shaykh did not order any of his disciples to leave their professions, businesses, or posts; the perfected one is he who moves among ordinary people while performing his duties. There is no work that God has made lawful that does not help the servant draw nearer to His presence. It only deters those who lack pure intentions in their work, whether it is in the field of learning, labor, or a professional career. A disciple once came to our master and asked permission to leave his work and give himself up completely to worship. The Shaykh said, "Remain in your shop and work and pray to your Lord. That is better for you than begging for food from people." The disciples were proud of their affiliation and used to boast of having visions of our noble Shaykh. They would compete with each other and believed that if his gaze merely fell upon a disciple he was transported to a higher state, and would attain realization. But the Shaykh himself knew that the divine light was not limited in this way and could come to the disciple anywhere, even if he were at the end of the earth.

Many visited the Shaykh for the purpose of acquiring his qualities and attributes, which were an embodiment of the Muhammadan nature. When our brother ‘Uthman Pasha, a Turkish minister in the Ottoman state, once visited him, he said to our Shaykh, ‘‘I have been honored with a vision of our master. Am I not then better than ‘Ali Rida Pasha?’’ The Shaykh answered him by saying, ‘‘Being united to the essences is better than being united to the qualities.’’ When Shaykh Hafiz ‘Uthman, the famous Turkish reciter of the Qur’an, came to visit my father, he composed a poem during his journey at sea. When he entered the *zawiya* my father asked about the poem he had composed, although no one had known anything about it. The Hafiz was astonished and asked, ‘‘Do you know what is hidden, or has a spirit inspired you?’’ Our Shaykh replied, ‘‘Do you not recite the Noble Qur’an?’’ ‘‘Certainly,’’ he said. ‘‘God has said in His Mighty Book: ‘The Knower of the Unseen, which He reveals unto none save every Messenger whom He has chosen (62:26–27).’ I am of those whom the Messenger of God has chosen, for I am descended from him and linked to him.’’ At this, Hafiz ‘Uthman was filled with joy and entered into the Way of the Shadhiliyya. He was one of those who attained to knowledge of God. The Shaykh also said to him while giving a talk one day, ‘‘You are of those who have preserved the Qur’an in your memory. Our Lord, the Glorious and Most High, has favored us with you.’’ Shaykh Hafiz ‘Uthman answered, ‘‘With those who put the prescriptions into practice.’’ Our Shaykh said, ‘‘Is there anyone aside from our Prophet who practices everything in the Qur’an? Rather, do you not practice only a part of it, even if only a single letter?’’ ‘‘Certainly,’’ he said. The Shaykh replied, ‘‘This suffices.’’ He also said, referring to the Sufi masters, ‘‘When you are told that there lives in Syria a great and wise man, learned in the sciences of the outward and the inward and in gnosis and realization, one possessing pleasing qualities and Muhammadan characteristics, that which comes to you is the Lore of Certainty (*‘ilm al-yaqin*). When you have abided with him and realized his outward and inward qualities, and found him to be above that which they have described to you, your knowledge of him becomes the Truth of Certainty (*haqq al-yaqin*). So what is it that has disappeared between yourself and him, when neither he nor you have changed, and there has been no increase or decrease in his being or in yours? The answer is that what has disappeared is your ignorance of him.’’

NOTES

Reprinted from a work published by Fons Vitae with the permission of the publisher. (Ed.) following a note signifies that the note was added by the General Editor of this set.

1. Farid al-Din ‘Attar (d. 1230 CE), Section on Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya in *Tadhkirat al-Awliya* (Memorial of the Saints) translated in Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic*

Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: The Paulist Press, 1996), 161.

2. Shaykh Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Madani was originally from the city of Mecca. In 1807, he left Arabia on a spiritual journey to Morocco, where he met Mulay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi in 1809. He also met a number of other famous Sufi shaykhs, including the West African revivalist Sidi Mukhtar al-Kunti (d. 1811) and Ahmad ibn Idris al-Fasi (d. 1837 CE), a Moroccan shaykh and Sufi reformer then residing in Arabia. Eventually settling in the region of Tripoli in Libya, Shaykh al-Madani founded the Tariqa al-Shadhiliyya al-Madaniyya, which, along with the Sanusiyya Tariqa, was one of the two great Sufi orders of Libya during the nineteenth century. Shaykh al-Yashruti, who was then living in Tunis, became acquainted with the Madaniyya order because of the close relations between Tunisia and Libya. See Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 70–71; See also R.S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 71. (Ed.)

3. Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic A.D. 717–801 and Her Fellow Saints in Islam* (1928 Cambridge University Press first edition; repr., San Francisco: The Rainbow Bridge, 1977), 102.

4. These famous lines by Ibn 'Arabi come from the collection of poems titled *Tarjuman al-ashwaq* (Interpreter of Desires). They have been reproduced and translated in many different ways. For an edition and translation based on Ibn 'Arabi's own commentary to this collection of poems, see *The Tarjuman al-Ashwaq: A Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyi'ddin Ibn al-'Arabi,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; repr., London: Theosophical Publishing House, Ltd., 1978), 66–70. (Ed.)

5. Chris Waddy, *The Muslim Mind* (Lanham, Maryland: New Amsterdam Books, 1990), 164–165.

6. *Takıya* is an Arabic term that means "place of repose." Among the Yashrutiyya Sufis, the term is used for a domed prayer hall. *Takıya* is the origin of the Turkish word *tekke,* which is a synonym for *zawiya* (literally, "corner"), a Sufi meeting place. (Ed.)

7. The Prophet Salih is mentioned in several Suras of the Qur'an. Salih was the prophet of a people called Thamud, who are described in the Qur'an as building castles in the plain and hewing houses out of hills (Qur'an 7:78). When they reject the One God, Salih warns his people that their gardens, springs, tilled fields, and date-palm groves will not last forever (Qur'an 25:146–149). The Qur'an also states that at the time of its revelation, one could see the dwellings of Thamud empty and in ruins (Qur'an 27:52). Clearly, Thamud were an Arab trading people because their ultimate transgression was to unlawfully hamstring a camel that was consecrated to God (Qur'an 11:64). For this sin, God destroyed them with an earthquake. The Qur'anic descriptions of Thamud fit the Pre-Islamic Nabataean civilization, centered at the capital city of Petra in modern Jordan, quite closely. The inhabitants of Petra built temples and castles in the plain and hewed tombs and other buildings out of solid rock, as described in the Qur'an. Archaeologists have also determined that Petra's prosperity was brought to an end by massive earthquakes in the years 363 and 561 CE. The association of the Prophet Salih with the Nabataeans is further strengthened by name of *Mada'in Salih* (Cities of Salih), which was given by local Arabs to a

famous Nabataean site in northwestern Saudi Arabia. Although the tomb of Salih that Shaykh al-Yashruti visited in Palestine is quite far from Petra, the greatest kings of Petra were occasionally known to have controlled Palestine and Syria as far north as Damascus. In a famous episode in 2 Corinthians 11:32–33, the Apostle Paul escapes from Damascus and the clutches of the Nabataean King Aretas by being lowered in a basket from the city walls. For a good description and overview of the history of Petra and the Nabataeans, see Jane Taylor, *Petra* (Amman, Jordan: Al-ʻUzza Books, 2005). (Ed.)

8. In 1913 the Committee of Union and Progress, also known as the Young Turks, took over direct control of the Ottoman government. The general Mustafa Kemal, who took the title of *Ataturk* (Father of the Turks) in 1934, assumed control of the secular government of Turkey in 1919 and ruled the nation until his death in 1938. After the end of World War I and the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, followed by the formal abolition of the Ottoman Empire in March 1924. (Ed.)

9. Saʻd Zaghlul (ca. 1860–1927) and other leaders of the *Wafd* (Delegation) Party of Egypt started a series of nationalist demonstrations against the British protectorate and ruling dynasty of Egypt in 1919. Their movement espoused a social revolution that advocated, among other things, the control of the Egyptian economy by Egyptians, the abandonment of the veil by women, women's participation in social life and nationalist politics, the destruction of the quasi-aristocratic pasha class, the assumption of power by people of peasant background, and the removal of the Turkish element from Egyptian politics. See Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment: 1922–1936* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 43–72. (Ed.)

10. The "Great Palestinian Disaster of 1948" of which Fatima al-Yashrutiyya refers are the events surrounding the creation of the State of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war. These events led to the flight and in some cases the forcible evacuation of much of the population of northern Palestine. (Ed.)

18

God's Madman

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

1

I saw a *majdhub*[1] at the Ka'ba
and O, was he crazy!
He took old men's canes and
threw them on the ground in the
path of people doing *tawaf*[2]
then paraded back and forth jubilantly,
crazy eyes gleaming.

He walked off in people's sandals,
gesturing, crying out in
hoarse, weird Arabic
phrases repeated
over and over. He was

about thirty, black hair, unruly
beard, wiry, intense, O
very intensely laughing and
insistently repeating things to a
crowd both
visible and invisible that
seemed to ignore him—*God's clown!*

He shuffled past in lady's shoes.
He was courteously escorted away by one of the
guards. Later he
sauntered by in a different robe, white
cap and

shoes altogether, momentarily
pinched from someone, still
muttering to himself. *In front of*
God's House! Ecstatically
rambunctious. Handsome,
more radiant than most. Fashioned directly from
God's hands. Let loose
among us. Out of control. But

not altogether: I saw him
walk past with an open
Qur'an in one hand as if
making a point,
waving his free arm, insisting on
something unknown to me in his
crazy discourse to
no one listening. I feared he might
throw the Qur'an down as he did the
canes and sandals, but
majdhubs are directly under God's command—
he was bodily
guarding the Word of God. He may have been
exhorting us to do so.
Starry eyes zigzagging back and forth
pouring light. Then

turning his head and
laughing!

2

What is attraction to God? The *majdhub* is
attracted to Allah with all
restraints removed, drawn magnetically,
tossing all scruples away, actually tossing his
resistance more than his
scruples, he's beyond
scruples, though some may be
even more scrupulous than the scholars about
every little thing,
fearful in the Majestic Presence of Allah that one
detail of the Prophet's *Sunna* be neglected, one

thought be
out of line—
that's their "craziness." Others

to God's Beauty go, like flocks of doves in
twilight, they laugh and sing
enthusiastically, weep and
lament, laugh and cry, in
crazy spirals of God's love.

Who knows what's
going on in their hearts.

He knows! That's
all they care about!

The moon reflected in a
pan of piss: God's Light in
this world!

The delicate petals of a hidden
blue flower unfurling.

Beetles black as Ethiopian princes
passing on a black rock
in the black of night.

Love expressed in an instant like a
tight-rope flung across the
Grand Canyon and
stepped out on,
high above silver clouds, first time
without teetering...

Rumi said: *If you want God's Love*
don't turn your back to the sun.

These mad flotsams ride waves
eternally beating our
shores. They let themselves be
pushed and lifted
by God alone.

They love the Light.

NOTES

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Time-Warp*. Reprinted from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

1. *Majdhub*, God-enraptured one.
2. *Tawaf*, the ritual of circumambulation around the Ka'ba in Mecca.

19

Jihad in Islam

Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani

In this chapter we would like to shed light on the meaning of Jihad, a term that has become universally known today. One can find countless interpretations of this term which differ from its true spirit and the meaning that God intended it in the Holy Qur'an and in the narrations of the Prophet (May God bless and preserve him). On the contrary people are using the term Jihad in this time in a way that suits their own whims without realizing the damage that they are causing Islam and Muslims.

What is meant by Jihad? The concept of "holy war" does not occur in the term Jihad, which in Arabic would be *al-harb al-muqaddasa*. Throughout the entire Qur'an, one cannot find a term that expresses the meaning "holy war." Rather the meaning of combative Jihad expressed in Qur'an or Hadith is simply war.

That said, I will show in this chapter, that Jihad in the classical sense does not simply mean war. In fact Jihad is a comprehensive term which traditionally has been defined as composed of 14 different aspects, only one of which involves warfare.

In this chapter we will explain unambiguously the different aspects of Jihad defined by the Prophet together with what renowned mainstream Muslim scholars have written about this subject citing them at length in order to arrive at an accurate understanding of this term.

Islamic thought includes all educational endeavors and scholarly opinions made in distinguishing Islam's core principles, its simplicity and its tenderness and compassion in its approach to all aspects of human relations.

Today there are many individuals who study Islam from a superficial point of view and emerge with their own ideas and imaginary interpretations which often diverge greatly from the established legislation in the area of study. Because of such studies lacking a true basis in Islamic jurisprudence, many non-Muslims are given an improper understanding about Islam.

So in this chapter we will return to the original source texts bringing up the issue of Jihad in order to explain its various different facets and clarify its understanding once and for all.

THE MEANING OF JIHAD

Jihad in its basic meaning is "to struggle" as a general description. Jihad derives from the word *juhd,* which means *al-taʿb,* fatigue. The meaning of *Jihad fi sabil Allah,* struggle in the Way of God, is striving to excess in fatiguing the self, to exhaust the self in seeking the Divine Presence, and to bring up God's Word, all of which He made the Way to Paradise.

For that reason God said:

> And strive hard (*jahidu*) in (the way of) God, (such) a striving as is due to Him.
>
> (Qur'an 22:78)

It is essential to understand that under the term *jahidu* come many different categories of Jihad, each with its specific context. The common understanding of Jihad to mean only war is refuted by this tradition of the Prophet's:

> A man asked the Prophet "Which Jihad is best?" The Prophet said, "The most excellent Jihad is to say the word of truth in front of a tyrant."[1]

The fact that the Prophet mentioned this Jihad as "most excellent" means that there are many different forms of Jihad.

IBN QAYYIM'S FOUR CATEGORIES OF JIHAD

Islamic scholars, from the time of the Prophet until today, have categorized Jihad into more than 14 distinct categories. Jihad is not simply the waging of war, as most people today understand. War in fact, or combative Jihad, according to many scholars, is only one of 14 different categories of Jihad.

In his book *Zad al-Maʿad,* Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya divided Jihad into four distinct categories:

1. Jihad Against the Hypocrites
   a. By heart
   b. By tongue
   c. By wealth
   d. By person

2. Jihad Against the Unbelievers
   a. By heart
   b. By tongue
   c. By wealth
   d. By person
3. Jihad Against the Devil
   a. Fighting Satan defensively against false desires and slanderous doubts about faith that he throws toward the servant.
   b. Fighting Satan defensively from everything he throws toward the servant of corrupt passion and desire.
4. Jihad of the Self
   a. That one strives to learn guidance and the religion of truth of which there is no felicity or happiness in life or in the hereafter except by it. And when one neglects it, one's knowledge is wretched in both words.
   b. That one strives to act upon religion after he has learned it. For the abstract quality of knowledge without action, even if one commits no wrong, is without benefit.
   c. That one strives to call to God and to teach Islam to someone who does not know it. Otherwise he will be among those who conceal what God had revealed of guidance and clarity. His knowledge does not benefit him or save him from God's penalty.
   d. That one strives with patience in seeking to call to God. When the creation harms him he bears it all for the sake of God.[2]

IBN RUSHD'S CATEGORIZATION OF JIHAD

Ibn Rushd, in his *Muqaddima,* divides Jihad into four kinds:

1. Jihad of the heart
2. Jihad of the tongue
3. Jihad of the hand
4. Jihad of the sword.[3]

Jihad of the Heart—The Struggle against the Self

The Jihad of the heart is the struggle of the individual with his or her own desires, whims, erroneous ideas, and false understandings. This includes the struggle to purify the heart, to rectify one's actions, and to observe the rights and responsibilities of all other human beings.

Jihad of the Tongue—Education and Counsel

Ibn Rushd defines Jihad of the tongue as:

> To commend good conduct and forbid the wrong, like the type of Jihad God ordered us to fulfill against the hypocrites in His Words, "O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites" (Qur'an 9:73).

This is the Jihad the Prophet waged in struggling to teach his people. It means to speak about one's cause and one's religion. This is known as the Jihad of Education and Counsel.

God first revealed:

> Read in the name of Thy Lord!
>
> (Qur'an 96:1)

The first aspect of the Jihad of Education is through reading. Reading originates with the tongue.

> O Prophet! strive hard *[jahid]* against the unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be firm against them.
>
> (Qur'an 9:73)

Jihad of the Hand—Development of Civil Society and Material Progress

Jihad of the hand includes the struggle to build the nation through material development and progress, including building up civil society, acquiring and improving every aspect of technology, and societal progress in general. This form of Jihad includes scientific discovery, development of medicine, clinics and hospitals, communication, transportation, and all necessary underlying infrastructure for societal progress and advancement, including educational institutions. Building also means to open opportunities to the poor through economic programs and self-empowerment.

Another aspect of Jihad by Hand is through writing, for God said:

> He taught by means of the pen, taught mankind what he did not know.
>
> (Qur'an 96:4–5)

The meaning of writing includes the use of computers and all other forms of publication.

Jihad of the Sword—Combative War

Finally, Jihad of the hand includes struggle by the sword (*jihad bi-l-sayf*), as when one fights the aggressor who attacks him in combative war.

JIHAD IN HISTORY AND LAW

Following this brief summary, let us now consider the nature of Jihad more fully as it appears in the history and law of Islam. Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, a contemporary Sunni scholar from Syria, states in his seminal work on the subject *Jihad in Islam*[4]:

> The Prophet invited the unbelievers peacefully, lodged protests against their beliefs and strove to remove their misgivings about Islam. When they refused any other solution, but rather declared a war against him and his message and initiated the fight, there was no alternative except to fight back.[5]

The most fundamental form of Jihad, usually overlooked in today's pursuit of newsworthy headlines, is the Jihad of presenting the message of Islam—*da'wa*. Thirteen years of the Prophet's 23-year mission consisted purely of this type of Jihad. Contrary to popular belief, the word Jihad and related forms of its root word *jahada* are mentioned in many Meccan verses in a purely noncombative context.

Combative Jihad in the technical usage of Islamic law means "the declaration of war against belligerent aggressors." It is not a haphazard decision taken by anybody but only by the leader of the nation. The principles of Islamic jurisprudence state that the actions of the leader must be guided by the interests of the people.

The Jihad of Education

Thus, we see that the building blocks of today's concept of rights were present in the Prophet's message from its very outset when the Jihad of Education took on the aspects of struggle in the Messenger's first years of preaching, as the chiefs of the Meccan tribes sought to suppress the freedom of expression, speech, and debate that were sought by the Prophet in teaching the new faith. God states in the Qur'an:

> Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.
>
> (Qur'an 16:125)

Calling people to Islam and making them acquainted with it in all its aspects through dialogue and kind persuasion is the first type of Jihad in Islam, in contrast to the imagined belief that Jihad is only of the combative form. This is referred to in the Qur'an where God says:

> So obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them (by preaching) with the utmost endeavor with it (the Qur'an).
>
> (Qur'an 25:52)

Here the word "strive," *jahidu,* is used to mean struggle by means of the tongue—preaching and exhortation—and to persevere despite the obstinate resistance of some unbelievers to the beliefs and ideals of Islam.

Ibn 'Abbas

Ibn 'Abbas and others said that God's words "strive with the utmost endeavor" denote the duty of preaching and exhortation as the greatest of all kinds of Jihad. Ibn 'Abbas said that "with it" refers to the Holy Qur'an.[6] Thus, the form of Jihad here considered as most essential by Ibn 'Abbas, cousin and associate of the Prophet and foremost exegete of the Qur'an, is the call to the Word of God, the Jihad of Education.

Imam Malik bin Anas

Imam Malik bin Anas stated in *al-Mudawwana al-kubra:*[7]

> The first of what God has sent His Messenger is to call people to Islam without fighting. He did not give him permission to fight nor to take money from people. The Prophet stayed like that for thirteen years in Mecca, bearing all kinds of persecutions, until he left for Medina.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya says in *Zad al-Ma'ad:*

> God commanded the Jihad of Education when He revealed: "Therefore listen not to the Unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness, with the (Qur'an)" (Qur'an 25:51, 52). This is a Meccan chapter, therefore

> [God] commands therein the Jihad of the non-Muslims by argumentation, elocution and conveying the Qur'an.[8]

Imam Nawawi

Imam Nawawi in his book *al-Minhaj,* when defining Jihad and its different categories, said:

> ...one of the collective duties of the community as a whole (*fard kifaya*) is to lodge a valid protest, to solve problems of religion, to have knowledge of Divine Law, to command what is right and forbid wrong conduct.[9]

Imam al-Dardir

The explanation of Jihad in Imam al-Dardir's book *Aqrab al-Masalik* is that it is propagating the knowledge of the Divine Law by commanding right and forbidding wrong. He emphasized that it is not permitted to skip this category of Jihad and implement the combative form, saying, "the first [Islamic] duty is to call people to enter Islam, even if they had been preached to by the Prophet beforehand."[10]

Imam Bahuti

Similarly, Imam Bahuti commences the chapter on Jihad in his book *Kashf al-Qina'* by showing the injunctions of collective religious duties (*kifayat*) that the Muslim nation must achieve before embarking on combative Jihad, including preaching and education about the religion of Islam, dismissing all the uncertainties about this religion and making available all the skills and qualifications which people might need in their religious, secular, physical, and financial interests because these constitute the regulations of both this life and the life to come. Hence, *da'wa*—performing the activities of propagating Islam and its related fields of knowledge—is the cornerstone of the "building" of Jihad and its rules; and any attempt to build without this "cornerstone" would damage the meaning and reality of Jihad.[11]

Dr. Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti

Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti says in his book *Al-Jihad fil-Islam*:

> The most significant category of Jihad was the one established simultaneously with the dawn of the Islamic *da'wa* (calling for Islam) at Mecca. This was the basis for the other resulting kinds accorded with the situations and circumstances.[12]

Removing all misconceptions and stereotypes in clarifying the image of Islam held by non-Muslims, building a trusting relationship, and working

with them in ways that accord with their way of thinking are all primary forms of Educational Jihad. Similarly, establishing a strong community and nation which can fulfill all physical needs of its people, thereby creating for them conditions in which the message will be heard, rather than being lost in the strife and struggle of everyday life, are requirements and form a basic building block of the Jihadic concept. These foundations fulfill the Qur'anic injunction:

> Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: and these it is that shall be successful.
>
> (Qur'an 3:104)

Until this is accomplished the conditions of combative Jihad remain unfulfilled.[13]

Sayyid Sabiq

Sayyid Sabiq, in his renowned work *Fiqh al-Sunna,* says:

> God sent His Messenger to all of mankind and ordered him to call to guidance and the religion of truth. While he dwelled in Mecca, he called to God by using wisdom and the best exhortation. It was inevitable for him to face opposition from his people who saw the new message as a danger to their way of life. It was through the guidance of God that he faced the opposition with patience, tolerance and forbearance. God says: "So wait patiently (O Muhammad) for thy Lord's decree, for surely thou art in Our sight" (Qur'an 52:48). "Then bear with them (O Muhammad) and say: Peace. But they will come to know" (Qur'an 43:89). "So forgive, O Muhammad, with a gracious forgiveness" (Qur'an 15:85).
>
> Here we see that God does not permit the fighting of evil with evil, nor to wage war on those who oppose the message of Islam, nor to kill those who cause discord among the Muslims. And He said: "Nor can goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate!" (Qur'an 41:34).
>
> As the persecution continued, it became harder and harder to bear, reaching its peak when the Quraysh conspired against the life of the Noble Messenger. At this time, it became imperative that he migrate from Mecca to Medina, both for his personal safety, for the very survival of the new faith, and in an effort to avoid war. Thus thirteen years after the commencement of Qur'an's revelation, the Prophet ordered his companions to emigrate to Medina.

Here, we see that the Prophet did not engage in repulsing the aggressive attacks against the Muslims by his tribesmen but sought to avoid conflict and avoid their persecution by means of migration.

Establishment of the Islamic Nation-State

Sayyid Sabiq continues:

> "And when those who disbelieve plot against thee (O Muhammad) to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they plot, but God (also) plotteth; and God is the best of plotters" (Qur'an 8:30).
>
> Medina thus became the new capital of Islam. As a nation-state for the Muslims, and their new home, an entirely new political situation had evolved. Whereas before the Muslims had been a persecuted minority with no land or political base, upon establishing Medina as a nation ruled by the legislation of Islam, and a sanctuary to which new Muslims under persecution could flee, it was imperative to protect this homeland from the aggressive designs of the enemy, who sought nothing less than the complete extirpation of the Muslim faith and killing of its adherents. Thus when the enemies opened war against them the situation of the Muslims became gravely dangerous, taking them to the brink of destruction at the hands of the enemy, in which case the very message was in danger of being lost.[14]

So Jihad in its combative sense did not come about until after the Prophet and his companions were forced to leave their country and hometown of Mecca, fleeing for safety to Medina after 13 years of propagating the call to the faith and calling for freedom of belief. God said:

> But verily thy Lord,- to those who leave their homes after trials and persecutions, - and who thereafter strive and struggle [for the faith] and patiently persevere, - Thy Lord, after all this is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.
>
> (Qur'an 16:110)

So we see that after the migration to Medina, God described Jihad as a struggle which was suffered patiently through persecution and trial.

First Legislation of Combative Jihad

Even then the legislation to fight was not made until the Meccans set out to eliminate the newly established Islamic nation, by building an army and setting forth with the intention of assaulting and destroying the community in Medina.

Sayyid Sabiq continues:

> The first verse revealed regarding fighting was:
>
> Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged; and God is indeed Able to give them victory; Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our Lord is God. For had it not been for God's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters and churches

and oratories and mosques, wherein the name of God is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Verily God helpeth one who helpeth Him. Lo! God is Strong, Almighty. Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. And God's is the sequel of events.

(Qur'an 78:39–40)

This verse shows that permission for fighting is granted for three reasons:

1. The Muslims were oppressed by their enemies and expelled by them from their homes unjustly for no reason except that they practiced the religion of God and said, "Our Lord is God." They then came under the obligation to take back the country from which they had been expelled.
2. Were it not for God's permission for this type of defense, all places of worship (including churches, synagogues, and mosques), in which the name of God were remembered, would have been destroyed (see Denial of Religious Freedom for a more detailed explanation of this aspect) because of the oppression of those who aggressively oppose belief.
3. The goal of victory in Islam is to establish freedom of religion, to establish prayer, to give charity and to command the good and forbid evil.

This last justification also means that as long as the preaching and practice of Islam are not circumscribed, the Muslims cannot fight a Jihad against a country in which Muslims freely practice their religion and teach Islam.

In the second year after the Migration, God ordered the Muslims to fight by saying:

Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. God knoweth, ye know not.

(Qur'an 2:216)

This verse shows that warfare was disliked in general, and was not something sought after; despite this, it was called for at times when the security of the nation was threatened by external belligerency.

Thus, with a simple and studious examination of the relevant verses, we discover that there were two different kinds of Jihad: that of Mecca and that of Medina. The Jihad in Mecca was primarily by education. In Medina Jihad was by two methods:

1. education
2. fighting, but only after the enemies attacked the Prophet within his own city-state. Additionally, the Muslims who had been expelled invoked the right to return to their homeland, and if opposed, to use force.

As explained earlier, there are 14 different categories of Jihad, only one of which entails fighting. Since it is this, the combative Jihad, which is now the focus of this chapter, I will now speak on the principles of such combat.

Combative Jihad was authorized only after the Prophet migrated along with his followers from Mecca to Medina, having been persecuted and expelled from their country fleeing from persecution and torture. This is not unlike what we see today: people fleeing from persecution in their home countries, becoming refugees in foreign nations. And the supporters, *al-Ansar,* of Medina, welcomed the refugees (*al-Muhajirun*) and shared with them all they possessed of their wealth and their homes.

The struggle in the way of God, *al-jihad fi sabil Allah,* which the Prophet began by teaching the Qur'an in Mecca, was primarily one of enlightenment and education, whereas in Medina his message became the basis of civic society and social life. This is borne out by the emphasis the Prophet made on caring for the poor, the emancipation of slaves, giving rights to women and building a civic society by levying taxes on the rich to benefit the poor, and by establishing community centers and community homes in which people could meet. These teachings were brought to a society in Mecca in which injustice ruled, and for this reason the Prophet was persecuted and fled to Medina. There he was able to establish a nation-state based on freedom of speech and freedom of religion where all religions flourished together without conflict.

In establishing this society in Medina, the Prophet sought to keep his new nation safe, just as today every country has security as a dominant concern. Therefore, he built up an army of his followers to keep his borders safe from enemy attack. In particular the Muslims were under threat due to the Prophet's teaching opposing the hegemony of tyrants.

Thus, Medina became the first city for the believers in which the new message, Islam, was established and the Prophet and his followers sought to keep it safe. Just as all nations do today, they built up an army and weaponry. And, just as is done in the modern world, if anyone attacks a nation, its citizens are obliged to respond and repel those who attack them.

So the majority of Muslim scholars including Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik, and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal say that combative Jihad is to defend oneself and to repel the aggressors.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF NON-MUSLIMS

It is a right for the People of the Book to practice the laws of their religion, and to maintain judges and courts, enforcing the rules of their own religion among themselves. Their churches or temples are not to be demolished nor are their crosses (religious symbols) to be broken.

> The Messenger of God said, "Leave them to what they worship."

Additionally, the right of a Christian or a Jewish spouse of a Muslim is that she may go to her church or to her temple. It is not the right of her husband to prevent her from going.

Islam permits non-Muslims to eat the foods that their religion allows. Swine are not killed nor is wine destroyed as long as it is permitted to them. Therefore, non-Muslims have more latitude than the Muslims, who are prohibited from drinking wine and eating pork.

They have the freedom to follow their own laws of marriage, divorce, and charity and to conduct these affairs as they wish without any conditions or limits.

Their honor and rights are under the protection of Islam, and they are given freedom to the right of deliberation and discussion within the limits of reason and decorum, while adhering to respect, good conduct and avoiding rudeness and harshness. God says:

> And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)."
>
> (Qur'an 29:46)

> If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge.
>
> (Qur'an 9:6)

This also shows that even if polytheists come to the Muslims, seeking to live and work in their nation for any reason, it is ordered to grant them safety and security to demonstrate the great care and compassion Islam takes in the care of others. Such are free to move where they like. This clarifies the understanding that combative Jihad is only against those who actively disturb the peace.

In the view of some schools of jurisprudence, Islam mandates equal punishment for Muslims and non-Muslims except for those things permitted in their faith such as drinking wine or eating pork.

Islam makes lawful eating what the People of the Book slaughter and Muslim men are permitted to marry their women. God says:

> This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time,-

> when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues....
>
> (Qur'an 5:5)

Islam sanctions visiting and counseling their sick, offering them guidance, and dealing with them in business. It is established that when the Messenger of God passed to his Lord, his armor was given as credit for a debt from a Jewish person.

In another case, when some of the Companions sacrificed a sheep the Prophet said to his servant, "Give this to our Jewish neighbor."

It is obligatory for the leader of the Muslims (caliph) to protect non-Muslims who are in Muslim lands just as he would protect Muslims and to seek the release of non-Muslims who are captured by the enemy.

The Messenger of God forbade killing non-Muslims when he said:

> The one who kills a convenanter (*dhimmi*) will not smell the fragrance of paradise.[15]

It can truly be said that in Arab and Muslim nations, the Christians, the Jews, and all other non-Muslims are in fact covenanters, for they pay their taxes supporting the nation's standing army. Thus, it is the duty of the ruler to protect the safety of the covenanter. The concept of a covenant of protection, while not explicitly spelled out today, is fulfilled through government taxation.

The popular, yet controversial, Islamic scholar Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi said:

> Jihad is an obligation on everyone but not killing and fighting.

Citing Ibn Qayyim's division of Jihad into 14 different levels including struggle against the ego, struggle against Satan, and the establishment of education, only one of them being combat against an aggressor, Shaykh al-Qaradawi
states:

> Whoever looks into the sources as to the understanding of Jihad, will see that one can be a *mujahid* [of the 14 categories] but it is not necessary to be a combatant; that is only when combat is forced on you by the invasion of your country.

FORCED CONVERSION

We have seen above that the foundation of Jihad is Islamic propagation (*da'wa*). The question often asked is whether Islam condones or teaches

the forced conversion of non-Muslims. This is the image sometimes projected by Western scholars and as any Muslim scholar will tell you, it is seriously flawed. The Qur'an clearly states:

> There is no compulsion in religion, the path of guidance stands out clear from error.
>
> (Qur'an 2:256; 60:8)

In this verse, the phrase "path of guidance" (Ar. *rushd*) refers to the entire domain of human life, not just to the rites and theology of Islam.

There is no debate about the fact that pre-Islamic Arabia was a misguided society dominated by tribalism and a blind obedience to custom. In contrast, the clarity of Islam and its emphasis on reason and rational proofs excluded any need to impose Islam by force. This verse is a clear indication that the Qur'an is strictly opposed to the use of compulsion in religious faith. Similarly, God addressed the Prophet saying:

> Remind them, for you are only one who reminds.
>
> (Qur'an 88:21)

God addresses the believers, urging them to obey the injunctions of Islam:

> Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and beware (of evil): if you do turn back, then know that it is Our Messenger's duty to proclaim (the message) in the clearest manner.
>
> (Qur'an 5:92)

This verse makes it clear that the Messenger's duty is only to proclaim and preach the message; it remains to each individual to accept and to follow.

As for forced conversion, no reliable evidence exists that Muslims ever intended or attempted to impose the specific rites and beliefs of Islam. The histories of Central Asia, Spain, India, the Balkans, and all of Southeast Asia are concrete proof of this.

Islam's History of Good Treatment of Non-Muslims

It is thus well established in history that when persecution took place in non-Muslim lands against the People of the Book, they would seek refuge with the leader of the Muslims (caliph), and this refuge was not refused. A well-known example of this is the plight of the Jews in Andalusia after it was conquered by the Spanish and taken from the hands of the Muslim Moors. With the imposition of the infamously cruel Inquisition in 1492,

Jews and Muslims had no choice but to flee their homes, convert to Catholicism, or die. The Jews sought the protection of Sultan Suleyman of the Ottoman Empire, and asylum was granted. For this reason, one finds a sizable population of Jews in Istanbul, which was the seat of the Ottoman Empire at that time.

CONDITIONS FOR COMBATIVE JIHAD

The ruler, the Imam, is completely answerable to the people and their legal apparatus, the most important representatives of whom are the scholars. The position of the law is that Jihad is permissible only when it can be proven that

- there are aggressive designs against Islam;
- there are concerted efforts to eject Muslims from their legally acquired property; and,
- military campaigns are being launched to eradicate them.

At such a time the ruler can declare and execute the provisions of combative Jihad.

Precondition: Leadership

Dr. Buti in *Jihad in Islam* says:

> It is known that Islamic Shari'a rules can be divided into two groups: first, the Communicative Rules (*ahkam al-tabligh*) that inform you how to behave in your life, including all matters of worship and daily life, and second, the Rules of Leadership (*ahkam al-imama*) which are related to the judicial system, the Imam or leader.
>
> The Rules of Leadership are those rules that have been directed from the leader to the citizens. In the time of the Prophet he was leader, so this applied to anything directed from the Prophet to the Muslims. After the Prophet, such directives became the responsibility of the caliph, his successor. This means that the Imam of the Muslims is the leader of every Muslim nation. He is the person responsible for the application of the rules as he sees fit. These rules are flexible within the geographical, societal, and cultural norms of the nation, which the leader can exercise by God's grace, to apply them for the benefit of all the people.
>
> Declaring combative Jihad is the foremost responsibility of the Imam (leader, president, or king of a nation). He is the only responsible person that can declare the time and place of Jihad, lead it or terminate its mission. It is in no way the responsibility of individual Muslims to declare Jihad without the order of the leader. Note in this regard the ulama are not in the position to issue a call for combative Jihad.

There are two kinds of combative Jihad. One is the combative Jihad to fight a nation which attacks a Muslim nation. The second category of combative Jihad, which is called *al-sa'il,* means the fight against an assailant, attacker, or violator. We will not go into this aspect as it falls under the Communicative Rules, not the Rules of Leadership. This is based on the hadith related by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, in which the Prophet said, "He who is killed in defense of his belongings, in self-defense, or in defense of his religion is a martyr."[16]

The category *al-sa'il* refers to someone defending his private possessions as when someone attacks him at home or his business in order to steal, to harm, or out of hatred due to differences of religion. This does not come under the aspect of Leadership, where nations are involved.[17]

Ibn Qudama

It is an essential precondition that there be a leader of the Muslims, an Imam, to declare combative Jihad. In *al-Mughni,* Ibn Qudama, a respected scholar of the Hanbali school, states:

> Declaring Jihad is the responsibility of the Ruler and consists of his independent legal judgment. It is the duty of the citizens to obey whatever the Ruler regards appropriate.[18]

Dardir

Dardir says: "Proclaiming Jihad comes through the Ruler's assignment of a commander."[19]

Jaza'iri

Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri states that the pillars of combative Jihad are:

> A pure intention that it is performed behind a Muslim Ruler and beneath his flag and with his permission.... And it is not allowed for Muslims to fight without a Ruler because Allah says: "O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you" (Qur'an 4:59).[20]

Tahanui

According to *Kashf al-Qina'a* by Tahanui:

> Ordering combative Jihad is the responsibility of the Imam and his legal judgment (*ijtihad*) because he is the most knowledgeable about the enemy's status and their nearness or farness, their intention and conspiracy.[21]

Qirafi

Qirafi said:

> The Leader is the one who has been chosen for the foreign policy of his county, and he has been entrusted by the people to conduct the common affairs of the state, sign treaties, forbid wrong deeds, suppress criminals, fight aggressors, and settle people down in their homes and the like.[22]

Mawardi

Mawardi, a Shafi'i authority, while enumerating the obligations of a Muslim ruler says:

> His sixth obligation is to conduct [combative] Jihad against those who show hostility against Islam. . . .[23]

Sarakhsi

Sarakhsi in *al-Mabsut* said:

> The Ruler of the Muslims must always exert all efforts to lead an army himself or dispatch a military detachment of Muslims; and trust in God to aid him in achieving victory.[24]

Sharbini

Sharbini said:

> Collective-duty Jihad becomes applicable when the Imam fortifies the frontiers (to gain equal military parity with the enemy), reinforces the fortresses and ditches, and arms his military leaders. It also becomes relevant by the Imam or his deputy's leading the army. . . .[25]

The Pakistani monthly *Renaissance* in discussing the authorization for declaring combative Jihad says:

> Both the Qur'an and the established practice of the Prophets of God explicitly say that Jihad can only be waged by a state. No group of people have been given the authority to take up arms, because individual groups if given this license will create great disorder and destruction by fighting among themselves once they overcome the enemy. A study of the Qur'an reveals that the Makkan Surahs do not contain any directive of combative Jihad for the fundamental reason that in Makkah the Muslims did not have their own state.
>
> Islam does not advocate "the law of the jungle." It is a religion in which both human life and the way it is taken hold utter sanctity. Thus Islam does not give Muslims any right to take life unless certain conditions are fulfilled. So, it was

> not until an Islamic state was established in Madinah that the Qur'an gave the Muslims permission to take up arms against the onslaught mounted by the Quraysh: "To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to fight] because they have been oppressed and verily God is Most Powerful to help them. [They] are those who have been expelled from their homes without any basis, only because they said: 'Our Lord is God'" (Qur'an 22:39–40).
>
> Consequently, the Prophet never retaliated in Makkah to the inhuman treatment which was given to him as well as to some of his Companions. He preferred to suffer and be persecuted than to counterattack his enemies, since Muslims at that stage had not fulfilled this all-important prerequisite of combative Jihad: establishment of a state.
>
> Similarly, the earlier prophets were not allowed by the Almighty to wage war unless they had established their political authority in an independent piece of land. For instance, the Prophet Moses, as is evident from the Qur'an, was directed to wage war only after he had fulfilled this condition. Since the Prophet Jesus and his Companions were not able to gain political authority in a piece of land, they never launched an armed struggle to defend themselves, despite intense persecution.
>
> Consequently, there is a consensus among all authorities of Islam that only an Islamic state has the authority to wage Jihad. [And where is the Islamic state today, with its fundamental principles? Therefore one easily concludes that today there is no valid state under which to wage combative Jihad.] Groups parties and organization have no authority to raise the call to arms. Whoever undertakes war without the authorization of the ruler in fact disobey the religion.[26]

Referring to the prerequisite of state authority, the Prophet said: "A Muslim ruler is the shield (of his people). A war can only be waged under him and people should seek his shelter (in war)."[27]

Sayyid Sabiq

This last condition is so explicit and categorical that all the scholars of the Muslim Umma unanimously uphold it. Sayyid Sabiq, while referring to this consensus, writes:

> Among *kifaya* obligations, there is a category for which the existence of a ruler is necessary e.g., [combative] Jihad and administration of punishments.[28]

Zafar Ahmad 'Uthmani

Zafar Ahmad 'Uthmani, a Hanafite jurist, writes:

> It is obvious from the Hadith narrated by Makhul[29] that Jihad becomes obligatory with the ruler who is a Muslim and whose political authority has been established either through nomination by the previous ruler similar to how Abu Bakr transferred the reins [of his Khilafah to 'Umar] or through pledging of allegiance by the *'ulama* or a group of the elite...in my opinion, if the oath of

> allegiance is pledged by the *'ulama* or by a group of the elite to a person who is not able to guard the frontiers and defend the honour [of the people], organize armies, or implement his directives by political force, and neither is he able to provide justice to the oppressed by exercising force and power, then such a person cannot be called "Amir" (leader) or "Imam" (ruler). He, at best, is an arbitrator and the oath of allegiance is at best of the nature of arbitration and it is not at all proper to call him "Amir" (leader) or an "Imam" (ruler) in any [official] documents nor should the people address him by these designations.... It is not imperative for the citizens to pledge allegiance to him or obey his directives and no [combative] Jihad can be waged alongside him.[30]

Imam Farahi

In the words of Imam Farahi:

> In one's own country, without migrating to an independent piece of land, [combative] Jihad is not allowed. The tale of Abraham and other verses pertaining to migration testify to this. The Prophet's life also supports this view. The reason for this is that if [combative] Jihad is not waged by a person who holds political authority, it amounts to anarchy and disorder.[31]

Albani

The Salafi scholar Albani, stressing the necessity of Jihad being established by the ruler of the Muslims, said:

> In the present time there is no Jihad in the Islamic land. While undoubtedly there is combat taking place in numerous places, there is no Jihad, established under a solely Islamic banner that abides by Islamic legislation.

From this we can understand that it is not permitted for a soldier to act according to his own wishes, but that he is obliged to follow the rules of the commander and his commands and that the commander must be delegated with proper authority by the caliph of the Muslims. So we can ask ourselves today, "Where is the Caliphate of Muslims in the present time?" Since there is no Caliphate, the fundamental principle of leadership is no longer present. Thus, while there still remains combat between one nation and another, it is no longer considered as fulfilling the religious obligation that Jihad entails.

The preceding quotations represent only a sampling of many quotes from scholars regarding combative Jihad and demonstrate the responsibility of the Imamate in ordering it. The Imam (Ruler) in fact is the only one responsible for repelling aggressors and for seeing what actions are fitting for the country. The actual title, whether he be called Imam, caliph, king, or president, is not important—his position as ruler is what counts. The leader is the one who has been elected to administer the foreign policy of his

nation, and he has been entrusted by the people to conduct the common affairs of the state, sign treaties, forbid wrong deeds, suppress criminals, fight aggressors, and settle people down in their homes and the like.

This specific duty can never devolve on a group of people living in a country who act against a government by terrorizing innocent citizens. It is not acceptable in Islam by any means for someone to declare combative war if he is not in the position of leadership.

The many aforementioned rulings of scholars and the many verses of Qur'an and Hadith refute the methods of the so-called ''Islamic parties'' who establish states within the state and act as if they are the rightful rulers of the Muslims.

Their methodology is to initiate war by attacking non-Muslims in their countries, and they do this without the permission of the Muslim rulers or the Muslim nation and without the consensus of its scholars. What happens then? The result is that everyone suffers from the disastrous consequences of their actions. This subject is discussed in detail in Rebellion Against Rulers.

Self-Defense

Naturally every community has the right to self-defense, and in the case of Islam, where religion is the primary dimension of human existence, war in defense of the nation becomes a religious act. A lack of understanding of this quality of Islam, its nonsecularism, has also contributed considerably to the fear that when Islam talks about war it means going to war to convert. This might be true in other cultures, but Islam must be allowed to speak for itself.

Dardir says of this:

> Jihad becomes a duty when the enemy takes [Muslims] by surprise.[32]

Dr. Buti shows that fighting in this case is an obligation of the community as a whole.

This is based on the Prophet's saying, ''He who is killed in defense of his belongings, or in self-defense, or for his religion, is a martyr.''[33]

God said:

> God does not forbid you from those who do not remove you from your homes (by force) and who do not fight you because of your religion, that you act kindly and justly towards them. . . .
>
> (Qur'an 60:8)

This verse mentions a fundamental principle of Islam regarding Muslim/non-Muslim relationships. Muslims are enjoined to act kindly and justly

toward members of other faiths except in two circumstances: first, if they dispossess Muslims of their legitimate land rights, and second, if they engage in hostilities toward Muslims by killing or attacking them, or show clear intent to do so (*al-hiraba*) because of their religion. In the second eventuality, it is the duty of the Muslim ruler to declare combative Jihad as a defensive action to repel such attacks.

It is evident from the Qur'an and other sources that the armed struggle against the polytheists was legislated in the context of specific circumstances after the Prophet had migrated from Mecca to Medina. There he secured a pact with the Jewish and Arab tribes of the city, who accepted him as the leader of their community. In the milieu of this newly founded base of operations, under the governance of Divine legislation and the leadership of the Prophet, Islam attained the status of a nation with its corequisite territory and the accompanying need to protect its self-interests. At that time the divine command was revealed permitting Jihad, but this occurred only after:

- Persistent refusal of the Meccan leadership (the Prophet being in Medina at the time) to allow the practice of Islam's religious obligations, specifically to perform the Hajj at Mecca. Note that despite this belligerency, the Prophet agreed to a truce.
- Continuous unabated persecution of Muslims remaining at Mecca after the Prophet's emigration to Medina triggered an armed insurrection against Qurayshite interests in the Hijaz.
- Meccans themselves started military campaigns against the Muslims at Medina with the sole objective of eradicating Islam.
- Key security pledges were abrogated unilaterally by a number of tribes allied to the Prophet, forcing him into a dangerously vulnerable position.

These conditions for defensive Jihad involving armed struggle were then clearly specified in the Qur'an:

> And fight in the way of God those who fight against you, and do not transgress [limits] for God likes not the transgressors.
>
> (Qur'an 2:190)

Explaining this verse, Sayyid Sabiq states:

> This verse also consists of prohibiting aggression due the fact that God does not love aggression. This prohibition is not abrogated by any verse and is a warning that aggression is devoid of God's love. Verses that consist of such warnings are not abrogated because aggression is tyranny and God never loves tyranny. Therefore a legal war is justified only when it is to prevent discord and harm to the Muslims and for them to have the freedom to practice and live according to their religion.[34]

God says:

> Will you not fight a people who have violated their oaths and intended to expel the Messenger while they did attack you first?
>
> (Qur'an 9:13)

The clear picture that emerges here is that the command to fight was given in relation to specific conditions. Thus, the declaration of war is not an arbitrary act at all.

> To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged;- and verily, God is most powerful for their aid.
>
> (Qur'an 22:39)

Expulsion

The Qur'an then goes on to describe the conditions of those who are permitted to fight:

> They said: "How could we refuse to fight in the cause of God, seeing that we were turned out of our homes and our families?"
>
> (Qur'an 2:246)

> (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right,- (for no cause) except that they say, "our Lord is God." Had not God checked one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure. God will certainly aid those who aid his (cause);- for verily God is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will).
>
> (Qur'an 22:40)

Explaining this verse, Imam Abu Ja'far ibn Jarir at-Tabari explained that were God not to check one set of people by means of another, then "monasteries belonging to Christians, synagogues belonging to Jews and mosques belonging to Muslims, where God's Name is often mentioned, will all be destroyed." Thus, Islam advocates the upholding of religious freedom, not for Muslims alone, but as is stressed by the order of the religions mentioned in the verse in which the rights of non-Muslims are upheld first, and lastly those of Muslims.

The Qur'an then goes on to describe the attributes of those whom He ordains for defense of the faith, and who protect the right of religious freedom, saying:

> (They are) those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with God rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs.
>
> (Qur'an 22:41)

Here God describes the defenders of the faith as those who are sincere and pious, for they establish prayer and give charity, prevent wrongdoing, and enjoin good conduct.

Denial of Religious Freedom

In later times, the Muslims engaged in warfare to establish the "Pax Islamica" or Islamic Order. The legal and political order must flow from the divine imperative (the Qur'an and the Sunna). It alone guarantees the rights of every individual by keeping in check all the dark psychic tendencies of man and so prevents him from indulging in antisocial behaviors and from political aggression, right down to the commonest criminal act. It is for this reason that the Qur'an calls on the believers to go forth in defense of those whose rights and liberty have been trampled by the unbridled tyranny of oppressors and conquering armies, or who are prevented from freely hearing the word of God espoused to them by preachers and educators. God says:

> How should ye not fight for the cause of God and of the feeble among men and of the women and the children who are crying, "Our Lord! Bring us forth from out this town of which the people are oppressors! Oh, give us from Thy presence some protecting friend! Oh, give us from Thy presence some defender."
>
> (Qur'an 4:75)

This verse gives two explanations, among other reasons for fighting:

1. First is fighting in the cause of God, which is the intent the religion calls for until discord has vanished and the religion is practiced freely for God alone. This means one cannot fight a Jihad against a country in which Muslims can freely practice their religion and teach Islam to others.
2. Second is fighting for the sake of the weak, such as those who converted to Islam in Mecca, but were unable to undertake the migration to Medina. The Quraysh tortured them until they prayed to God for liberation. They had no means of protection from the persecution of the oppressors.

God permitted armed Jihad against an aggressor, when He said:

> Lo! God hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs: they shall fight in the way of God and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an.
>
> (Qur'an 9:111)

So the rule of repelling aggression is not specifically for Muslims but is also the role of anyone following the Torah and the Gospel—the right to fight those who attack them. Giving oneself in God's Way means repelling the aggressor. "A promise binding on Him in truth" means that God took this promise on Himself as a right, not only in the Qur'an but also in the Torah and the Gospel, giving the believers the Garden of Paradise in exchange for their selves and their lives.

He said, "God bought from the believers their lives and their wealth." This means to give one's wealth for building up society, for the welfare of others, and for establishing hospitals, schools, and civic society.

Can Muslims Fight if Religious Practice is Not Proscribed?

God said:

> God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for God loveth those who are just.
>
> God only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong.
>
> (Qur'an 60:8–9)

One sees here that God does not hinder the Muslims from dealing justly and kindly with those who do not fight them for their religion. Thus, we see that Muslims today live in many non-Muslim nations, and they are living in peace, observing all their religious obligations and are free to practice their faith.

Today one cannot find any nation in which mosques are forced to close, or the authorities are removing the Qur'an or other religious books, or where Muslims are prevented from praying, paying their poor-due, fasting, or attending the pilgrimage. Instead we find that all Muslims today are free to practice their faith in every nation around the globe.

We find that in non-Muslim universities Islamic texts, including large troves of ancient manuscripts, are preserved.

> Surely God loves those who are just.
>
> (Qur'an 5:42)

This shows that Islam urges the believers to practice goodness with those who do good to them, and thus they are not permitted to attack them.

> If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge.
>
> (Qur'an 9:6)

This also shows that even if polytheists come to the Muslims, seeking to live and work in their nation for any reason, it is ordered to grant them safety and security to demonstrate the great care and compassion Islam takes in the care of others. Such are free to move where they like. This clarifies the understanding that combative Jihad is only against transgressors.

Possibility of Success

Jihad against countries that are guilty of oppression and persecution only becomes compulsory after all political negotiations have failed, if the enemy is set on aggression. Additionally, the Muslims may fight when there is a likelihood of success. The state must make preparation of whatever is necessary from weapons, materials, and men with the utmost possible scope as God says:

> Make ready for them all thou canst of (armed) force.
>
> (Qur'an 9:6)

This means that the leader must prepare and establish what is necessary of weapons, materials, and men with the utmost possible scope, as well as spending to the utmost from the nation's capability and expending every effort, for it is God's rule that without strength one cannot fight, for to do so would result in killing oneself and killing one's people and the creation of mayhem (*fitna*), which in fact is worse than killing, for God says:

> Tumult and oppression (*fitna*) are worse than slaughter.
>
> (Qur'an 2:191)

Creating mayhem (*fitna*) might grow to become a war or become a hate crime against innocent people. That is why God said it is worse than killing. *Fitna* is the work of *munafiqin,* hypocrites. This is in fact conspiracy, the result of which may be a great war instigated between one or more nations, which may end up in the death of thousands or millions of innocents.

> Now God has lightened your [task] for He knows that there is weakness among you. So if there are of you a hundred steadfast persons, they shall overcome two hundred, if there are a thousand of you, they shall overcome two thousand with the leave of God and God is with the patient.
>
> (Qur'an 8:66)

Thus, God declares that if the ratio of Muslim warriors to their opponents is half (1:2) they may fight and they will be given Divine Support in an open fight facing the enemy directly, warrior-to-warrior. This was a reduction from the original ratio, in which the believers were obliged to fight even if the ratio of Muslims to their opponents was one to ten.

Without Adequate Fighting Capacity Should War Be Instigated?

The rule "Without adequate fighting capacity war should not be instigated" also means that if the enemy is more than twice the Muslim force, then there is no possibility of success and therefore at that time one must not set forth. To do so will create nothing but *fitna*—a state of destruction and confusion.

Here the following questions arise: How can a group declare combative Jihad against an entire nation, when the group possesses no more than a few dozen or a few hundred dedicated warriors? If it is not permitted for 19 people to fight a group in excess of 38, what then about instigating war against a massively fortified and armed nation of over 250 million, such as Al Qaeda has done? This is in reality nothing more than mayhem, and the result is endangerment of the entire Muslim Umma. This is nothing but *fitna*—confusion, sedition, disorder, and mayhem—and the Prophet declared those who create turmoil to be under God's curse:

> Confusion/sedition/mayhem (*fitna*) is dormant. God curses the one who rouses it.

Today's radicals justify combative Jihad without state authority by citing the skirmishes carried out by one of the Muslim converts against the Meccans. *Renaissance*'s Shehzad Saleem explains:

> We know from history that after the treaty of Hudaybiyya, Abu Basir defected to Madinah. According to the terms of the treaty he was duly returned back to the Quraysh by the Prophet. He was sent back in the custody of two people of the

Quraysh. He killed one of his two custodians and again defected to Madinah. When he arrived in Madinah, the Prophet was angry with what he had done. Sensing that the Prophet would once again return him to the Quraysh, he left Madinah and settled at a place near Dhu'l-Marwah, where later on other people joined him. From this place, they would attack the caravans of the Quraysh.

If these guerrilla attacks are analyzed in the light of the Qur'an, the basic thing which comes to light is that whatever Abu Basir and his companions were doing was not sanctioned at all by Islam. The Qur'an says that the actions and deeds of a person who has not migrated to Madinah are not the responsibility of the Islamic state: "And as to those who believed but did not migrate [to Madinah], you owe no duty of protection until they migrate" (Qur'an 8:72).

Not only did the Qur'an acquit the newly founded Islamic state of Madinah from the actions of these people, we even find the following harsh remarks of the Prophet about Abu Basir when he returned to Madinah after killing one of his two custodians:

"His mother is unfortunate! Though he is in the right, he is going to ignite the flames of war."[35]

IS ISLAM BY NATURE HOSTILE TO NON-MUSLIMS?

The idea, often postulated in the media, that Islam is hostile to non-Muslims simply because they are non-Muslims is a major misconception. According to the majority of scholars, beyond the conditions described above, there exists no valid reason to hold any hostility toward non-Muslims. Sayyid Sabiq says:

> The relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims is one of acquaintance, cooperation, righteousness and justice for God says: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)" (Qur'an 49:13).
>
> And in advising righteousness and justice He says: "God does not forbid you from those who do not remove you from your homes (by force) and who do not fight you because of your religion, that you act kindly and justly towards them..." (Qur'an 60:8).
>
> Among the bases of this relationship are the mutual, general well being (or welfare) of a society and the strengthening of human relations.[36]

The reference in these verses is to the non-Muslims in general.

Loyalty and Enmity (al-wala' wa al-bara'a)

Many of today's self-appointed Islamic leaders and scholars state:

> Enmity for the sake of God (*al-bara'a*) means to declare opposition in deed, to take up arms against His enemies....[37]

Sayyid Sabiq says:

> This meaning does not prevent friendship with non-Muslims. The prohibition exists only when friendship with non-Muslims is meant in aggression against the Muslims. Serious dangers to the existence of Islam come from assisting non-Muslims who are [actively] working against the Muslims, weakening the power [and security] of the believing society.
>
> As far as the relationship between the Muslims and non-Muslim subjects (*dhimmis*) living in Muslim nations, Islam calls for harmony, peace, good manners and courtesy, friendly social intercourse, mutual welfare and cooperation for the sake of righteousness and good conscience.

Even with regard to those who fight against the Muslims, despite their enmity, God says:

> It may be that God will grant love (and friendship) between you and those whom ye (now) hold as enemies. For God has power (over all things); And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.
>
> (Qur'an 60:7)

DOES ISLAM CALL FOR ONGOING WAR AGAINST NON-MUSLIMS?

Some Orientalists as well as some radical interpreters of Islam assert that Islam condones an ongoing combative Jihad, and that it means a continual war upon the non-Muslims until they repent and accept Islam or else pay the poll tax. However, the majority of Muslim scholars reject this view, citing as evidence:

> ...and if any of the polytheists seeks your protection then grant him protection, so that he may hear the Word of God, and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men who know not.[38]
>
> (Qur'an 9:6)

The Imams argued from this that as long as the unbelievers are willing to live peacefully among the believers our divine obligation is to treat them peacefully, despite their denial of Islam. The succeeding verse affirms this:

> So long as they are true to you, stand you true to them. Verily! God loves those who fear God.
>
> (Qur'an 9:7)

This verse instructs the Muslims to observe treaty obligations with meticulous care, and not to break them unless the other side breaks them first.

On the basis of the clear arguments of the scholars of Qur'an and Hadith, the majority concluded that physical fighting is not a permanent condition against unbelievers, but is resorted to only when treaties are broken or aggression has been made against Muslim territory (*dar al-Islam*) by unbelievers.

On the other hand, educating non-Muslims about Islam *is* a continuous Jihad, per the agreed-upon, multiply transmitted hadith:

> The Messenger of God said, "I have been ordered to *fight* the people until they declare that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger, establish prayers, and pay *Zakat*. . . ."[39]

In his book *al-Jihad fil-Islam,* Dr. Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti explains this hadith in detail based on the understanding of the majority of jurists, showing that linguistically the word "fight" here and in many other places does not refer to combat, rather to struggle, including in its scope *da'wa,* preaching, exhortation, and establishment of the state apparatus whereby Islamic preaching is protected. It does not mean forcing anyone to become Muslim at the point of a sword, and numerous examples can be cited from the life history of the Prophet showing that he never forced conversion, nor did his successors.

Dr. Buti explains that the linguistic scholars of Hadith showed that the word *uqatil* used by the Prophet in fact means "fight" and not *aqtul,* "kill." In Arabic, this word is used in terms of defending against an attacker or an oppressor; it is not used to mean attack or assail.

In light of this, Dr. Buti shows that this hadith connotes:

> I have been ordered by God to fulfill the task of calling people [peacefully] to believe that God is One and to defend any aggression against this divine task, even though this defense requires fighting aggressors or enemies.[40]

Dr. Buti explains that this hadith is reminiscent of a saying by the Prophet on the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya:

> where he told his mediator, Badil ibn Waraqa, "But if they do not accept this truce, by God in whose Hands my life is, I will fight with them, defending my Cause till I get killed."[41]

By these words, Badil ibn Waraqa was tasked with inviting the Quraysh to peace, and simultaneously, warning of the ongoing war which had already exhausted them. Dr. Buti remarks:

> The Prophet's words "I will fight with them defending my Cause," in this context certainly means that he, while inclining to peace with the enemy, would react to their combative aggression in the same way, if they had insisted on their aggression.[42]

Note also that in the years after the Treaty was signed, it was the Quraysh who violated the treaty. Near the end of the seventh year after the migration to Medina, the Quraysh along with the allied Banu Bakr tribe attacked the Banu Khuza'a tribe, who were allies of the Muslims. The Banu Khuza'a appealed to the Prophet for help and protection.

The Banu Khuza'a sent a delegation to the Prophet requesting his support. Despite the Meccan provocation and clear violation of the treaty, the Prophet avoided acting in haste to renew hostilities. Instead he sent a letter to the Quraysh demanding payment of blood money for those killed and the disbanding of their alliance with the Banu Bakr. Otherwise, the Prophet said, the treaty would be declared null and void.

Quraysh then sent an envoy to Medina to announce that they considered the Treaty of Hudaybiyya null and void. However, they immediately regretted this step—and therefore, the leader of Quraysh Abu Sufyan himself traveled to Medina to renew the contract. Despite having been the greatest enemy of the Muslims, and despite the Quraysh already being in violation of the pact they had solemnly entered into, no hand was laid on this Qurayshi chief—someone who is infamous for his persecution and harm to Muslims in Mecca. He was even permitted to enter the Prophet's mosque and announce his desire to reinstate the treaty.

From this, one can argue that if a state of unbelief were sufficient pretext for war, then the Prophet would have been warranted in seizing Abu Sufyan and initiating hostilities against the Quraysh then and there. However, on the contrary, Abu Sufyan came and went from Medina freely and only after some time were the hostilities renewed based on the Meccans' aggressive violation of the pact.

God says:

> ...and fight the *mushrikun,* [polytheists Pagans] all together as they fight you all together. But know that God is with those who restrain themselves.
>
> (Qur'an 9:36)

Here, we understand "fight the unbelievers collectively as they fight you collectively" means "treat them in the same way as they treat you." Commenting on this, Dr. Buti says, "You should deal with the unbelievers kindly and equitably, unless they are rampant and out to destroy us and our faith. Hence the motive for [combative] Jihad becomes self-defense."[43]

Finally God says:

> So, if they hold aloof from you and wage not war against you and offer you peace, God alloweth you no way against them.
>
> (Qur'an 4:90)

This verse refers to the people who were not among those involved in fighting the Muslims and who stayed away from the battle between the two groups, and this is what Islam calls for. The above is an explicit statement from God, that it is not permitted to fight with those who are not engaged in belligerency, despite their being nonbelievers in Islam.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN COMBAT?

Communal Obligation

Let us begin with the most prevailing common understanding held by both Muslims and non-Muslims, who are not Islamic scholars, that Jihad means war against unbelievers.

Combative Jihad is not an obligation on every Muslim, rather it is a communal obligation (*fard kifaya*) fulfilled when someone takes on the duty to repel the enemy. God says:

> And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware.
>
> (Qur'an 9:122)

Here, God shows that combative Jihad is not for everyone. If a group of people have been assigned to go for combative Jihad by their leader, the rest must not go. Rather their duty is to stay behind and study, in order to educate themselves and to educate others.

So from this verse, God splits the people who participate in Jihad into two categories: one group goes to battle and the other stays behind to develop the understanding of religion in order to teach others. So even when combative Jihad has been called for, both those who go forth to combat and those who stay behind to develop the understanding of religion are participants in Jihad. This verse makes those who stay behind and study the religion equal to those who go forth to battle, by saying: "their duty is to stay behind and study, in order to educate themselves and to educate others."

In this verse God emphasizes that not all believers should go out to fight. This indicates that there is a decision to be made: who will go to fight and who will not? This implies the existence of a leadership that must first decide if it is necessary to fight or not. It is not the case that people from here and there may issue a call to go for fighting, which will result in nothing but anarchy.

Mu'adh ibn Jabal related:

> Acquire knowledge because doing so is goodness, seeking it is worship, reviewing it is glorifying God and researching it is Jihad....[44]

From this we can see that to learn the religion becomes more important than participation in battle, for it will elaborate for you all the beliefs and the rulings that Muslims must follow in their lives. Understanding the rulings of the religion, including those related to Jihad, is essential and can only be accomplished by study and education. If someone has not studied comprehensively the rulings of Jihad, he will easily come to the conclusion that every issue that is raised entails combative Jihad, whereas this is indeed not the case.

Conscription

Participation in combative Jihad becomes assigned to an individual when he is ordered by the leader to be present in the line of fire:

> The Messenger of God said: "There is no migration (after the conquest of Mecca), but Jihad and good intention. So when you are called to go forth in stopping aggression, then do so."[45]

This means that when you are called forth by your leader (I have explained before who has the right to issue a declaration of war), the Imam, you must obey, as that is part of obedience to God, the Prophet, and those in authority. And the condition for such a declaration of war is when the enemy suddenly attacks a land. In that case combative Jihad is incumbent on its inhabitants and they must go forth to defend their nation from aggression.

Along with this it is incumbent on any group, who seek to fight as soldiers in the way of God against aggression by unbelievers, to first pledge themselves to their leader—someone who fits the profile of an Imam from knowledge, piety, and effectiveness—who organizes the army. Thereafter they organize their ranks and prepare to fight.

Setting forth when called is *mandatory* on the Muslim when he is: male, possesses sound reason, has attained the age of maturity, is healthy, and whose family possesses sufficient funds for what they need until he completes the duty assigned to him by the leader.

God said, setting the rules for Jihad, "the believers should not all go out to fight" (Qur'an 9:122).

The verse begins with this statement to emphasize that not every person goes forth to battle, and it goes on to explain "from every troop of them, a party only should go forth, that those who are left behind may gain some knowledge in religion and that they may warn their folk when they return to them that they may beware."

God is showing that from every group, only a part of them goes forth. That means the army is to be formed from different citizens from various parts of the country, "from every group of them," which today means that volunteers or recruits who have been assigned to fight and who have been

trained go forth to fight, while the rest of the citizens remain behind to train and educate themselves.

> Not unto the weak nor unto the sick nor unto those who can find naught to spend is any fault (to be imputed though they stay at home) if they are true to God and His messenger.
>
> (Qur'an 9:91)

This verse means that there is no obligation on those who have a weak personality, or a radical mentality, nor on those who have no talent, to go forth, for war will not be good for them. This indicates that only those persons selected by the Ruler or his appointed leaders should go forth; not those who might commit rash actions because of excessive emotional zeal nor those who are mentally ill and might commit crimes like throwing bombs, suicide attacks, and so forth.

As Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya said in *Zad al-Ma'ad:*

> The Prophet said:
>
> The fighter is the one who fights himself in obedience to God and the one who emigrates is the one who emigrates from iniquities.[46]
>
> The Jihad of the self is a prerequisite over the Jihad against the enemy in the open and initial basis for it.
>
> Without a doubt, the one who does not fight his self (or someone who does not do what he is commanded and does not leave what has been forbidden and goes to battle in the way of God) it should not make combative Jihad against the external enemy. How is it possible for him to fight his [external] enemy, when his own enemy which is right beside him, dominates him and commands him? Since he did not wage war on the [internal] enemy of God, it is even more impossible for him to set out against the enemy until he fights himself.[47]
>
> "There is no blame for the blind, nor is there blame for the lame, nor is there blame for the sick (that they go not forth to war)" (Qur'an 29:17).

Surprise Attack

When the enemy suddenly arrives at a place where the Muslims reside, the inhabitants are obliged to go out and fight them and it is not allowed for anyone to be exempt from this obligation.

Age Requirement

Ibn 'Umar said, "I was presented to the Messenger of God at the time of the battle of Uhud when I was fourteen years of age, and he did not give me permission to fight."

This is because Jihad is not obligatory except on the one who has reached the appropriate age.

Jihad of Women

'A'isha asked, "O Messenger of God, is Jihad necessary for women?" He said, "Jihad without fighting. Hajj and 'Umra [are their Jihad]."[48]

God says:

> And covet not the thing in which God hath made some of you excel others. Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned, and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned. (Envy not one another) but ask God of His bounty. Lo! God is ever Knower of all things.
>
> (Qur'an 4:32)

It is reported by 'Ikrima that some women inquired about Jihad and other women said, "We wish that God would grant us a portion of what the military expeditions receive from the reward of what the men share."

This does not prevent women from going out to treat the wounded.

It is reported that the Prophet was out on a military expedition and Umm Salim was with him and other women from the Helpers. They were giving water to the fighters and treating the wounded.[49]

Parents' Permission

In the case of a major, obligatory combative Jihad, parents' permission is not required, but as far as the voluntary combative Jihad is concerned, their permission is required.

Ibn Mas'ud related:

> I asked the Messenger of God which action is most loved by God and he said, "Prayer in its time." Then I said, "Then what?" and he said, "Being good to your parents." Then I said, "What after that?" He said, "Jihad in the way of God."[50]

Ibn 'Umar said:

> A man came to the Prophet and asked permission for combative Jihad and he said, "Are not your parents alive?" He said, "Yes." Then he said, "Then ask them first, then fight."[51]

One does not go out in Jihad except if he has completed providing for the needs of his family and the service of his parents. For this is the prerequisite of Jihad; even more it is the best Jihad.

JIHAD BETWEEN MUSLIMS

Properly speaking Jihad, in the case of internal dissension, occurs only when two conditions are met: (1) the presence of a just leader (*Imam*); (2) an unjustifiable insurrection. In Islam, allegiance and obedience to a *just* authority is obligatory.

It must be noted also that rebellions against authority and especially political authority have no place in the concept of Jihad. In this age of relativism, the spirit of rebellion seems to have penetrated every layer of society. However, Islam and its principles cannot be made subservient to these cultural trends.

In some of the contemporary "Islamic" groups, Jihad has been adapted to a virtually Marxist or Socialist concept of class revolt aimed at overthrowing the authority of the state. In the often fervently materialistic milieu of contemporary political and revolutionary ideologies, Islam is inevitably reduced to nothing more than a social philosophy. This reductionism amounts to an abysmal misunderstanding of the essential function of Islam, which is to turn the face of the human being away from the world of disharmony and illusion toward the tranquility and silence of Divine awareness and vision. Inward Jihad, as we alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, has a key role to play in this respect.

SEEKING PEACE

The Ruler, the political leader of the country, has the power to ratify peace treaties consistent with the interests of the Muslims.

God said:

> Enter into peace completely and do not follow the steps of Satan.
>
> (Qur'an 2:208)

And:

> And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in God.
>
> (Qur'an 8:60)

Sayyid Sabiq states:

> This verse is the command to accept peace when the enemy accepts it, even if their acceptance is known beforehand to be deception and deceit.[52]

God says:

> And fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevails justice and faith in God; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except against those who practice oppression.
>
> (Qur'an 2:193)

From this verse we see that fighting is exhorted until oppression is ended. Thus, with the words ''but if they cease'' God legislates that once justice prevails and no one is prevented from observing his or her belief in God, then fighting should end. God grants that arms be set aside, ''except against those who practice oppression.''

> And fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily God doth see all that they do.
>
> (Qur'an 8:39)

Thus, peace is not only permitted but called for, after the adversary, even if still antagonistic, ceases his aggression. However, precaution and watchfulness is not to be abandoned in this situation, for here God reminds the Muslims of His Own Attribute, ''verily God doth see all that they do.''

The Prophet said, after establishing the Islamic state in Medina, that the way of the Muslims is one. No single group can autonomously declare war or fight, nor can any one group make peace by itself, but the entire country must make peace. A peace treaty can be made by the country's leader, and all subjects of the country are bound by that decision, regardless of whether the leader was appointed or elected. The final decision is up to the ruler after his consultation with others.

If a state has no leader then it must select one, or all the neighboring states and nations may come together and agree on a treaty with any foreign country. This applies today in the case of the Middle East Crisis. This applies as much to peace as it does to war. No individual or group may come forth and declare a Jihad, for such will be a false Jihad. All Muslim nations and their leaders must come together for a decision of war or peace and that is the only accepted process.

It is imperative to keep in mind that all verses about Jihad were revealed at specific times and pertaining to specific historical events. Our concern today is that radical extremists employ these verses outside their proper historical and revelatory context, merely cutting and pasting together what suits their evil inclinations, without accurate or sufficient knowledge of the applicability of such verses.

TAXATION

Ibn Qudama said that a treaty of peace involves agreeing with combatant non-Muslims for an end to hostility for a period of time, whether it involves paying a tax or not. He asserted that Muslims are allowed to make peace treaties that do not require non-Muslims to pay a tax, because the Prophet of God did so on the occasion of the Hudaybiyya Treaty. Ibn Qudama says that Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal gave this opinion as did Imam Abu Hanifa.[53]

CONDUCT OF COMBAT

Prohibition of Killing Noncombatants

Islam prohibits utterly the killing of those who are not actual military personnel.

The Prophet sent the following message to his military leaders who were setting forth in the way of Jihad to stop hostile advances and defend Muslim territories:

> Advance in the name of God, with God, on the pattern of the Messenger of God. That means do not kill the elderly, infants or children and women. Do not exceed the proper bounds. Gather your spoils and make peace "and do good. Lo! God loveth those who do good" (Qur'an 2:195).[54]
>
> The Prophet passed by a woman who was killed and said, "She was not engaged in fighting." The Prophet then sent to the Muslim leader Khalid ibn al-Walid the following message, "The Prophet orders you not to kill women or servants."[55]

This was to show that the reason for the prohibition of killing the woman was due to the fact that she was not with the fighters. The inference here is, "the reason we fight them is because they fight us, not on the simple principle that they are disbelievers." This is clear evidence that the woman was not a fighter and the Prophet prohibited her killing. From the strong expression the Prophet made, going so far as to send a letter to his topmost military commander, we see how concerned he was to prevent any such incidents and to insure that every single Muslim warrior was aware of the rules of combat.

Some questions arise here: When someone explodes a bomb or commits a suicide attack in a public place, how many innocent women, children, and elderly people are killed? If for one woman's death, the Prophet scolded his top general, Khalid ibn al-Walid, what then about killing twenty, thirty, or even hundreds of noncombatants, some of whom may even be Muslims?

Just as the Messenger of God forbade the killing of women and the young, he forbade killing priests.

The first caliph Abu Bakr as-Siddiq's commandment to the leader of the first Islamic military expedition after the Prophet was:

...No hermit should be molested...Only those should be killed who take up arms against you.[56]

So we see from these various narrations of the Prophet—and there are many more like them—that the Prophet prohibited the Muslims from fighting anyone, Muslims or non-Muslims, even if they are unbelievers, if they are not transgressors against the security of the nation.

This shows that terrorist acts, in particular suicide attacks which kill indiscriminately, are utterly unacceptable forms of combat, even during valid combat authorized for the defense of the nation.

Prohibition of Burning the Enemy

It is prohibited to burn the enemy with fire because the Messenger said, "Kill [the enemy] but do not burn him. For no one punishes with fire except the Lord of the Fire."[57]

This hadith illustrates the Prophet's emphasis on mercy and avoidance of harm when he established laws of conduct on the battlefield. In modern times only were such rules of warfare established, as in the Geneva Conventions, in which it is impermissible to kill or torture prisoners of war. Similarly, we see that 1,400 years ago, the Prophet established details of the rules of warfare in which even using fire in combat was prohibited, something which modern legislators of warfare have been loathe to adopt.

According to this hadith, weapons of fire are not approved by God. God prohibited burning, yet the majority of attacks by Islamic groups today involve bombs and explosions, such as the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11, where 3,000 people were incinerated.

Prohibition of Mutilating the Dead

'Imran ibn Husayn said the Messenger of God encouraged us to give charity and forbade us from mutilation.[58]

Prohibition of Despoiling

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq commanded the leader of the first Islamic military expedition after the Prophet saying:

> "No fruit-bearing trees are to be cut down and no crops should be set on fire. No animal should be killed except those slaughtered for eating…Only those should be killed who take up arms against you."[59]

Suicide Attacks

One of Islam's fundamental principles is the sanctity of life. Islam prohibits the killing of noncombatants, except those involved in a direct battle face-to-face between warriors. There is simply no room for maneuver in Islam to justify the killing of innocents, even as a form of mass retribution, which many radicals today use as justification for their large-scale attacks on civilians, for Islam prohibits blood feuds and specifies retribution only toward the one who commits a crime.

God says:

> Slay not the life which God has made sacrosanct unless it be in a just cause.
>
> (Qur'an 6:151)

> And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the Wrath and the Curse of God are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him.
>
> (Qur'an 4:93)

Since no one can say for sure that a specific person is not a believer, it becomes forbidden to kill any human being without just cause.

Suicide itself is specifically prohibited:

> Kill yourselves not, for God is truly merciful to you.
>
> (Qur'an 4:29)

and:

> Throw not yourselves into the mouth of danger.
>
> (Qur'an 2:195)

Thus, we see the general principle enunciated here that killing oneself is forbidden. The Qur'an did not leave anything without an explanation. This is a general principle that no one is permitted to kill another or to kill himself.

Killing Noncombatants

The one who attacks the enemy in repelling his aggression, fighting under the authorized leader of the Muslims, and fights and is killed becomes a

martyr (*shahid*). But to attack a public location where the ones killed are killed randomly without knowing if they are combatants or not is forbidden.

Today's militant radical Islamists cite a ruling by the Shafi'i scholar Mawardi in which he stated that when involved in combative Jihad, if the enemy has mixed noncombatants among warriors either by chance or intentionally as "human shields" then Muslim archers are allowed to fire on the enemy, despite the fact that due to the randomness of shooting, noncombatants might die. Expanding on this point, they argue that this ruling justifies bomb attacks against civilian areas.

This is nothing but a distortion of the law to suit their purposes. The ruling is very specific in that it allows such attacks on the assumption that it is only the combatants that are targeted by the archers, not the civilians, who only happen to be present or, in the worst case, have been placed as "human shields." The assumption of the jurist is also that the Muslims and the enemy are engaged in face-to-face fighting, between combatants. However, the attacks carried out by such militants in fact do not target combatants: rather they are typically placed in public locations more frequented by civilians, including innocent women, children, and nonmilitary persons.

In Islamic law, one cannot build a case on doubtful assumptions, such as "those people are likely all engaged in fighting Muslims." Such an argument is false, and the result is the killing of innocents without justification.

Prohibition of Suicide

Islam utterly forbids suicide. On this the Prophet said:

> Whoever kills himself in the world with anything, then God will punish him by that same thing on the Day of Judgment.[60]

The Prophet said:

> Among those who were before you, there was a man who was inflicted with wounds. He felt despair, so he took a knife and with it he cut his hand; blood kept flowing until the man died. God the Exalted said, "My slave has caused death on himself hurriedly; I forbid Paradise to him."[61]

Abu Hurayra narrated:

> We were in the company of God's Messenger on an expedition, and he remarked about a man who claimed to be a Muslim, saying, "This (man) is from the people of the (Hell) Fire." When the battle started, the man fought valiantly until he was wounded. Somebody said, "O God's Apostle! The man whom you described as being from the people of the (Hell) Fire fought valiantly today and died." The Prophet said, "He will go to the (Hell) Fire." Some people were on the point

of doubting (the truth of what the Prophet had said). Suddenly someone said that the man was still alive but severely wounded. When night fell, he lost patience and committed suicide. The Prophet was informed of this, and he said, "God is Greater! I testify that I am God's Slave and His Apostle." Then he ordered Bilal to announce amongst the people:"None will enter Paradise but a Muslim, and God may support this religion (i.e. Islam) even with a disobedient man."

The Prophet said:

Whoever throws himself down from a high mountain and kills himself will be throwing himself down from a mountain in the Fire of Hell for all eternity. Whoever takes poison and kills himself will be taking poison in the Fire of Hell for all eternity. Whoever kills himself with a weapon (literally, iron) will be holding it in his hand and stabbing himself in the stomach in the Fire of Hell for all eternity.[62]

The Prophet said:

Indeed, whoever (intentionally) kills himself, then certainly he will be punished in the Fire of Hell, wherein he shall dwell forever.[63]

A person [engaged in battle] killed himself with a broad-headed arrow. The Messenger of God said, "As for me, I will not pray over him."

Even a Mufti of the most fundamentalist school of law in Islam, the "Wahhabi/Salafi" school of thought, declared that suicide bombings have never been an accepted method of fighting in Islam. The Mufti of Saudi Arabia Shaykh ʻAbd al-ʻAziz Al Shaykh declared, "To my knowledge so-called 'suicide missions' do not have any legal basis in Islam and do not constitute a form of Jihad. I fear that they are nothing but a form of suicide, and suicide is prohibited in Islam." This echoes an earlier *fatwa* by his predecessor, the late Saudi Mufti Shaykh ʻAbd al-ʻAziz ibn Baz.

Like the suicide attackers of September 11, those who commit such atrocities in the name of religion are offenders. They can find no support for their actions in our creed. Nor can those who blow up themselves and others indiscriminately in shopping centers, theaters, or houses of worship find any justification in the faith's pristine teachings.

One justification that the terrorists make is the following account from the life of the Prophet in which the Prophet's paternal cousin Zubayr ibn al-ʻAwwam was participating in a battle against the Byzantine Army. Zubayr said to a group of Muslim soldiers, "Who will promise to go with me and fight our way through the enemy lines until we reach the end of their lines, then go around their camp back to our current position?" A group of fighters said, "We promise." Zubayr led a group of fighters and fought their way through many enemy lines until they reached the end of the Roman camp. They then went around the Roman camp and returned to the Muslim army.

The logic the terrorists use is that Zubayr and his companions were certain to die and thus committed suicide while fighting the enemy. In fact Zubayr did not tell his companions "Let us kill ourselves," before going on this challenging task. He only exposed himself and them to what is commonly expected in any form of warfare—the possibility of being killed by the

enemy. He did not intend to die, but to fight, and with God's support to win, or else to die by the enemy's hand. This is not suicide, rather it is bravery and heroism. Thus, the terrorists' "logic" is shown for what it is, illogical.

Islam has always required perfect chivalry and discipline. For that reason, soldiers are ordered to endure and fight even in the face of tremendous odds. The Islamic rules of military conduct never permit using civilians as targets or as hostages. In Islam, even so-called "collateral damage" is unacceptable. Therefore, if a Muslim kills himself, along with innocents, it is a doubly forbidden act.

Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi issued a *fatwa* condemning the tragic suicide attacks of 9/11, stating: "Even in times of war, Muslims are not allowed to kill anybody save the one who engages in face-to-face confrontation with them." He added that Muslims are not allowed to kill women, old persons, or children, and that haphazard killing is totally forbidden in Islam. Shaykh Qaradawi on another occasion defined terrorism as "the killing of innocent people…with no differentiation between the innocent and the foe."

Another widely followed religious scholar, Sayyid Tantawi, Grand Shaykh of Islam's highest institution of learning, the University of Al-Azhar, has said that attacks against women and children are "not accepted by Islamic law." Al-Azhar's Research Academy, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, declared that a "Muslim should only fight those who fight him; children, women and the elderly must be spared." Therefore, terrorism and its crime against civilians is impermissible under any interpretation of Islamic law. This ruling does not change based on geographical locality.

The Prophet said:

> Whoever fights under the banner of a people whose cause is not clear, who gets flared up with family pride, calls people to fight in the cause of their family honor or fights to support his kith and kin, and is killed, dies in a state of spiritual and moral ignorance (*jahiliyya*).
>
> Whoever indiscriminately attacks my Umma, killing the righteous and wicked among them, sparing not even those firm in faith, and fulfilling not a pledge made with whoever was given a promise of security, has nothing to do with me and I have nothing to do with him.[64]

This shows us very clearly that those who indiscriminately attack both Muslims and non-Muslims by suicide bombings, killing innocent people, and without focusing on anyone in particular, are rejected completely by the Prophet. Such is the case in many Muslim countries today, including the land of Hijaz, Pakistan, Darfur, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, and so forth. What is taking place in these nations today is clearly described in this hadith, "Whoever indiscriminately attacks my Umma, killing the righteous and wicked among them, sparing not even those firm in faith."

Emphasis in this hadith on ‘‘fulfilling not the pledge made with whoever was given a promise of security’’ is reference to those citizens who keep their civic obligations by paying taxes and pledging their allegiance to the government. Thus, both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens are encompassed in the scope of meaning of this hadith, and as for those who aggress against them, ‘‘he has nothing to do with’’ the Prophet and the Prophet has ‘‘nothing to do with him.’’

If someone asks, ‘‘What about suicide bombings against non-Muslims?’’

We say: ‘‘This is utterly wrong.’’

False Rulings Supporting Suicide Attacks

Often those who justify suicide attacks cite as evidence the story of the Companion Bara’ ibn Malik at the Battle of Yamama, in which the Muslims fought the false prophet Musaylima the Liar, who had begun the war by attacking the Muslims.

> The Muslims gained ground against the idolaters the day of Yamama until they cornered them in a garden in which Musaylima was staying. Bara’ ibn Malik said: ‘‘O Muslims, throw me to them!’’ He was carried aloft until when he was above the wall, he penetrated [the enclosure]. Then he fought them inside the garden until he opened it for the Muslims and the Muslims entered. Then God killed Musaylima.
>
> Bara’ threw himself onto them and fought them until he opened the gate after having received more than eighty cuts. Then he was carried away and tended. Khalid [ibn al-Walid] visited him for a month.[65]

The Companion threw himself into the ranks of the enemy, in order to throw open the fortress door, knowing full well that he would likely be killed in the process.

Studying this analogy, one finds that it is not relevant, for in the incident cited the two combatant armies were fighting face-to-face. In the process Bara’ did not kill innocent people. He threw himself at the enemy with the intention of either opening the door or dying in the attempt. In fact his death was expected at the hands of the enemy, not by his own action. And this, like the earlier example of Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwam, is exemplary of chivalry and bravery, not of the intent to commit suicide. In addition, Bara’ did not die, but survived his wounds.

Suicide bombings are actions in which innocent people are killed; some might even be supporters of one’s cause, while others are innocent. Thus, the above example does not apply. Such an act on the contrary is not suicidal; it is an act of bravery which is accepted in every nation and culture.

This means that whoever goes on his own and declares his own rulings, independent of the ruler of the Muslim Nation, falls under the label of

Jahiliyya—pre-Islamic ignorance and unbelief. Such a person establishes his own group and his own false rulings on fighting, causing all people to fall into tribulation due to his aggression.

The Hadith demonstrate the Prophet Muhammad's emphatic opposition to those who would declare a false combative Jihad. They also demonstrate that the Prophet predicted that people would arise who would create havoc and confusion, who would be arrogant and proud of themselves, and who despite appearances were in fact fighting for the sake of their families and tribes. This is not Jihad by any means but in fact falsifies the concept of Jihad as a whole.

We have seen that the Prophet extended shelter to a combatant pagan who was promised shelter by a Muslim woman. How then can we allow today's beheadings of those people who are working to help bring stability and support human rights in Iraq? The terrorists take innocent people, who have been given shelter by the existing government and are noncombatants, and behead them as combatants.

"Whoever indiscriminately attacks my Nation killing the righteous and the wicked among them, and fulfilling not a pledge made with whoever was given a promise of security, has nothing to do with me and I have nothing to do with him."

This portion of the hadith makes it abundantly clear that if someone attacks a person whose safety has been pledged by the nation's government to uphold, the Prophet abandons the attacker and disassociates himself from him. For the believer, nothing could be more distressing than for the Prophet to abandon him.

PRISONERS OF WAR

In regard to prisoners of war, God says:

> At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens.
>
> (Qur'an 47:4)

It was related from Umm Hani bint Abi Talib, who said to the Prophet, "My brother 'Ali said he will kill a person to whom I gave shelter, so-and-so son of Hubayra," who was a combatant pagan at that time. The Prophet said, "We shelter the person whom you have sheltered."[66]

In a similar vein is the hadith where the Prophet said: "He who gives a promise of safety to a man in regards to his life, then kills him, I am innocent of the actions of the killer, even if the one killed was a disbeliever."

It is established that the Prophet captured prisoners yet never did he compel or force anyone to embrace Islam. The same holds true for his Companions.

The Companions of the Messenger of God used to ransom captives and rejected killing them saying, "What would we gain from killing them?"

REBELLION AGAINST RULERS

The scholar Ibn Nujaym said, "It is not permitted for there to be more than one state leader (*Imam*) in a time period. There may be many judges, even in one state, but the leader is one."[67] Bahjuri said, "It is an obligation to obey the leader, even if he is not fair or trustworthy or even if he committed sins or mistakes."[68] Abu Hanifa's school says that the head of state, the Imam, cannot be expelled for being a corrupt person (*fasiq*).[69]

Bahjuri

Bahjuri said, ". . .You have to obey the Ruler even if he is oppressive."

This means that a group or an individual is not permitted to declare war against the ruler of a nation, especially by means of terrorizing the people through planting bombs and suicide attacks which kill innocents and incite mayhem.

And in his commentary on *Sahih Muslim* Bahjuri said, "It is forbidden to rise against the ruler."[70]

Amin Ahsan Islahi

While commenting on the underlying reasons that form the basis of state authority for combative Jihad, Amin Ahsan Islahi writes:

> The first reason [for this condition] is that God Almighty does not like the dissolution and disintegration of even an evil system until a strong probability exists that those who are out to destroy the system will provide people with an alternative and a righteous system. Anarchy and disorder are unnatural conditions. In fact, they are so contrary to human nature that even an unjust system is preferable to them. . .this confidence [that a group will be able to harmonize a disintegrated system and integrate it into a united whole] can be placed in such a group only if it has actually formed a political government and has such control and discipline within the confines of its authority that the group can be termed as *al-Jama'a* [the State]. Until a group attains this position, it may strive [by religiously allowable means] to become *al-Jama'a* – and that endeavor would be its Jihad for that time – but it does not have the right to wage an "armed" Jihad.

The second reason is that the power which a group engaged in war acquires over the life and property of human beings is so great that the sanction to wield this power cannot be given to a group the control of whose leader over his followers is based merely on his spiritual and religious influence on them [rather than being based on legal authority]. When the control of a leader is based merely on his spiritual and religious influence, there is not sufficient guarantee that the leader will be able to stop his followers from *fasad fi'l-ard* (creating disorder in the society). Therefore, a religious leader does not have the right to allow his followers to take out their swords (that is to wage an armed struggle) merely on the basis of his spiritual influence over them, for once the sword is unsheathed there is great danger that it will not care for right and wrong and that those who drew it will end up doing all [the wrong which] they had sought to end. Such radical groups as desire revolution and the object of whom is nothing more than disruption of the existing system and deposition of the ruling party to seize power for themselves play such games – and they can, for in their eyes disruption of a system is no calamity, nor is it cruelty or any kind an evil. Everything is right to them [as long as it serves their purpose].[71]

Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman narrated a hadith in which he said:

The Prophet said, "there will be after me leaders who do not follow my guidance and do not follow my *Sunna,* and there will be among them men whose hearts are like those of Satan in the body of a human being." And I asked the Prophet, "What should I do at that time if I reach it?" He said, "listen and obey the ruler, even if he lashes your back and takes your money, listen and obey."[72]

In another narration, Awf bin Malik said, "O Prophet of God, do you recommend that we fight them?" He said, "No, don't fight them as long as they do not prevent you from your prayers. And if you see from them something that you dislike, dislike their acts, but do not dislike them. And do not take your hand out from obedience to them."[73]

It is narrated from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas that the Prophet said:

If someone dislikes his ruler, he must be patient, because if he comes against the ruler in a rebellious or destructive manner by only a handspan and dies, he dies in a state of pre-Islamic ignorance (*jahiliyya*) and sin.[74]

Other hadiths with similar purport are:

The Prophet said, "There will be over you leaders whom you will recognize and disapprove of; whoever rejects them is free, whoever hates them is safe as opposed to those who are pleased and obey them." They said, "Should we not fight them?" He said, "No, as long as they pray."

The Prophet said, "The best of your leaders are those you love and they love you, you pray for them and they pray for you. The worst of your leaders are those

who anger you and you anger them and you curse them and they curse you." We replied, "O Messenger of Allah should we not remove them at that?" He said, "No, as long as they establish the prayer amongst you...."[75]

These source texts are clear evidence that whoever lives under a particular government must obey the ruler and live peacefully. They are prohibited from taking up arms against him. Uprising or violence by any group against the ruler is completely rejected in Islam and was prohibited by the Prophet and will be a cause of death on the way of ignorance (*jahiliyya*). Thus, Islam considers rebellion against the ruler a great iniquity. These hadiths affirm that one must be patient with one's ruler, even if he commits oppression. These hadiths refer to the leader of a nation, not the leader of a small group. Therefore, groups that take up violent struggle against their regimes are prohibited in Islam and are by default illegal and blameworthy.

In fact the true path to correction of the mistakes of a ruler is according to the hadith "a most excellent Jihad is when one speaks a word of truth in the presence of a tyrannical ruler."[76] Note here the hadith does not mention fighting the ruler, but rather praises the one who corrects the ruler by speech. Armed and violent opposition to a state regime can never be recognized as Jihad in the way of God, despite the claims of many groups. Unfortunately we see today countless individuals and groups who label their rulers and their governments apostates or unbelievers, thereby giving themselves the excuse to declare "Jihad" against them, asserting that this is because they do not rule by what was revealed to the Prophet. Even worse, they go further by terrorizing and killing government officers, members of the armed forces, and public servants, simply because they are easy targets. These groups use a "militant Islamic" ideology to justify such felonious action, declaring the ruler, the government, and its officers to be criminals standing in the way of "true Islam," who must be eliminated. Thus, those who are innocent of any crime, but who are earning a living and raising their families, such as officers and officials of ministries and departments, county and city officials, and police, become targets of these extremist ideologues. Such groups do not hesitate to kill them in surprise attacks, terrorizing the entire nation by blasting here and there, and harming the innocent.

If the ruler commits a mistake, it is not permitted to label him an apostate, nor to indoctrinate people to use militancy to oppose him. In the time of the Prophet after the conquest of Mecca, a Companion named Hatib ibn Abi Balta assisted some of the enemies by supporting them extensively and passing them secret information. It may be that no one today supports a tyrannical ruler as Hatib supported the unbelievers at that time.

When questioned as to his motives, Hatib replied:

O Prophet of God! Don't hasten to give your judgment about me. I was a man closely connected with the Quraysh, but I did not belong to this tribe, while the other emigrants with you had their relatives in Mecca who would protect

> their dependents and property. So, I wanted to compensate for my lacking blood relation to them by doing them a favor so that they might protect my dependents. I did this neither because of disbelief nor apostasy nor out of preferring disbelief (*kufr*) to Islam.
>
> The Prophet of God said, "Hatib has told you the truth."[77]

We see here that the Prophet, though fully aware of Hatib's actions, never considered him to be outside the fold of Islam, nor did he inflict any punishment on him. Regarding Hatib and his support of the unbelievers God revealed the following verse:

> O you who believe! Do not take My enemy and your enemy for friends: would you offer them love while they deny what has come to you of the truth, driving out the Messenger and yourselves because you believe in God, your Lord?
>
> (Qur'an 60:1)

Though the verse reprimands Hatib showing him to be in the wrong, nonetheless God did not take him out of the state of faith, but yet continued to address him with the honorable title "O you who believe," despite his assisting the enemies of Islam.

This constitutes proof that even if someone assists a regime that does not support Islam, one cannot harm that person as the Prophet did not inflict any punishment on Hatib. One wonders then how today so many groups freely label those working for the government as renegades and apostates and issue fierce edicts to kill them? Their work with the government might be for their livelihood or for building a bridge of trust for the Islamic community to ensure a better future relationship or a better understanding of Islam. Such actions are baseless in Islam and are founded on an extremist ideology, far removed from the middle path which always constitutes this blessed religion of God.

THE INNER JIHAD

Islam is not a rhetorical religion, but it is based on unity, love, and rational action. Soon after the Prophet's death, Islam radiated outwardly from its earthly center, the Ka'ba, the physical symbol of Divine Unity (*tawhid*). Jihad was the dynamic of this expansion. Outwardly it embodied the power of Islam against error and falsehood, while inwardly it represented the means of spiritual awakening and transcending the self. Referring to this, the Prophet said while returning from battle:

> We are now returning from the lesser Jihad to the greater Jihad, the Jihad against the self.[78]

The Prophet is reported to have said during the Farewell Pilgrimage:

> . . . The Fighter in the Way of God is he who makes Jihad against himself (*jahada nafsahu*) for the sake of obeying God.[79]

God says in the Holy Qur'an,

> Those who have striven for Our sake, We guide them to Our ways.
>
> (Qur'an 29:69)

In this verse, God uses a derivative of the linguistic root of the word ''Jihad'' to describe those who are deserving of guidance, and has made guidance dependent on Jihad against the false desires of the soul. Therefore, the most perfect of people are those who struggle the most against the selfish promptings of the ego for God's sake. The most obligatory Jihad is that against the base side of the ego, desires, Satan, and the lower world.

The great Sufi Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd said:

> Those who have striven against their desires and repented for God's sake, shall be guided to the ways of sincerity. One cannot struggle against his enemy outwardly (i.e. with the sword) except he who struggles against these enemies inwardly. Then whoever is given victory over them will be victorious over his enemy, and whoever is defeated by them, his enemy defeats him.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is apparent that the understanding of Jihad as a concept is dismally blurred by the ongoing rhetoric employed by financially empowered Islamist activists and extremist scholars. Disregarding centuries of classical scholarship, using a simplistic, literal approach to the Qur'an and holy traditions of the Prophet, they have built a convincing picture of Jihad as militant, continuing warfare between the Muslims and the non-Muslims—a situation they contend will persist until the end of time.

The only way to dispel the false notions of Jihad put forth by the extremists, who are massively funded by external sources, is an equally strong effort put forth by Muslim governments in the reeducation of their populations, in particular the youth, with a correct understanding of this concept. Such efforts must be sustained and ongoing and must have the support of modern, moderate Muslim scholars in each nation.

We propose the following recommendations for each nation engaging in these reeducation efforts:

1. follow-on discussions to create a response to the current abuse of the term Jihad;
2. development and staging public presentations to educate the public based on the information and discussions in (1);
3. publish literature detailing the accurate definition of Jihad and distributing this literature in large quantities;
4. encourage modern, moderate scholars to stand up and speak up in opposition to the extremists;
5. create a national podium for modern, moderate scholars;
6. publish in public media the proceedings of the above-mentioned debates and discussions by modern, moderate scholars.

NOTES

1. *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Similar *ahadith* are narrated in Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi.
2. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zad al-Ma'ad*.
3. *Muqaddima,* Ibn Rushd (known in the Western world as Averroës), 259.
4. Muhammad Sa'id R. al-Buti, *al-Jihad fil-islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995).
5. Ibid., 44.
6. Ibid., 16.
7. Imam Malik bin Anas, *al-Mudawwana al-kubra,* 180.
8. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zad al-Ma'ad*.
9. Nawawi, *al-Minhaj,* 210.
10. Imam al-Dardir, *Al-Sharh al-Saghir*.
11. Mansur bin Yunus al-Bahuti, *Kashf al-qina'a,* 33.
12. Buti, *Al-Jihad fil-islam,* 16.
13. *Musnad* Ahmad. Similar ahadith are narrated in Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi.
14. Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna,* 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Beirut: Daru'l-Fikr, 1980).
15. Ibn Majah reported it in his *Sunan,* from 'Abd-Allah bin 'Amr.
16. Narrated by Abu Dawud, ibn Majah, Tirmidhi, and Ahmad.
17. Buti, *al-Jihad fil-islam,* 108–109.
18. Ibn Qudama, *al-Mughni,* vol. 9, 184.
19. Dardir, *al-Sharh al-Saghir,* vol. 2, 274.
20. Abu Bakr al-Jaza'iri, *Minhaj al-Muslim,* chapter on Jihad.
21. Tahanui, *Kashf al-qina'a,* vol. 3, 41.
22. Qirafi, *al-Ahkam fi tamyiz al-fatawa,* 24.
23. Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya,* 1st ed. (Beirut: Daral-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1990), 52.
24. al-Sarakhsi, *al-Mabsut,* vol. 10, 3.
25. Sharbini, *Mughni al-muhtaj,* vol. 4, 210.
26. Shehzad Saleem in "No Jihad without a State," *Renaissance Monthly,* December 1999.

27. Bukhari.

28. *Fiqh al-Sunna,* 30. Cited by Shehzad Saleem in "No Jihad without a State," *Renaissance Monthly,* December 1999.

29. The complete text of the *Hadith* is:

> Makhul narrates from Abu Hurayra who narrates from the Prophet: "*Jihad* is obligatory upon you with a Muslim ruler whether he is pious or impious, and the prayer is obligatory upon you behind every Muslim whether he is pious or impious even if he is guilty of the major sins." (*Sunan Abu Dawud,* No. 2171)

30. Zafar Ahmad 'Uthmani, *Lila al-Sunan,* 3rd ed., vol. 12 (Karachi: Idarat al-Qur'an wa al-'Ulum al-Islamiyya, 1415 AH), 15–16. Cited by Shehzad Saleem in "No Jihad without a State," *Renaissance Monthly,* December 1999.

31. Imam Farahi, *Majmu'a tafasir-i-farahi,* 1st ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1991), 56. Cited by Shehzad Saleem in "No Jihad without a State," *Renaissance Monthly,* December 1999.

32. Dardir, *al-Sharh al-Saghir,* vol. 2, 274.

33. Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi.

34. Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna.*

35. Bukhari.

36. Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna.*

37. Muhammad Sa'id al-Qahtani, *al-Wala' wa al-Bara'a,* trans. Omar Johnstone.

38. The singular exception to this consensus being the opinion of Imam Shafi'i.

39. A mass-transmitted hadith narrated by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, an-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah from Abu Hurayra.

40. Buti, *al-Jihad fil-islam,* 58.

41. Bukhari.

42. Buti, *al-Jihad fil-islam.*

43. Ibid., 92.

44. Imam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, *Warathat al-Anbiya',* chap. 8, 37–38.

45. Bukhari reported it from Ibn 'Abbas.

46. Ahmad recorded it in his *Musnad,* from Fadala ibn 'Ubayd.

47. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zad al-Ma'ad.*

48. Related by Muslim and Bukhari.

49. Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Tirmidhi.

50. Muslim and Bukhari recorded it.

51. Bukhari, Abu Dawud, and an-Nisa'i. Tirmidhi graded it sound.

52. Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna.*

53. Ibn Qudama, *al-Mughni,* vol. 12, 691–693.

54. Abu Dawud narrated it in his *Sunan* from Anas bin Malik.

55. Narrated in the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud from Rabih ibn Rabi', and Tabari narrated a similar tradition in his *al-Awsat* from Ibn 'Umar. Similar narrations are related in Ibn Majah, and Ahmad from Hanzala.

56. Cited in *Ta'rikh al-Tabari,* vol. 3, 226–227.

57. Abu Dawud narrated it in his *Sunan,* from Muhammad ibn Hamza al-Aslami from his father.

58. Narrated in Bukhari.

59. Cited in *Ta'rikh al-Tabari,* 226–227.

60. Reported by Abu Awana in his *Mustakhraj* from the hadith of Thabit ibn al-Dahhak. A similar hadith is reported by Abu 'Imran by al-Bazzar but its chain contains Ishaq ibn Idris who is rejected as a Hadith source.

61. Bukhari.

62. Reported by Bukhari, 5778.

63. Bukhari (5778) and Muslim (109 and 110).

64. Muslim.

65. The first narration is by Baqi ibn Makhlad in his *Musnad* narrated from Ibn Ishaq. The second is from Thumama, from Anas. Both are cited by Hafiz Ibn Hajar in *al-Isaba fi Tamyiz al-Sahaba,* vol. 1, 279–280.

66. Bukhari and Muslim.

67. Ibn al-Nujum, *Al-Ashbah wal-nadha'ir,* 205.

68. Al-Bahjuri, *Sharh Sahih Muslim,* vol. 2, 259.

69. Imam Abu Hanifa, *Sharh al-'aqa'id al-nasafiyya,* 180–181.

70. Al-Bahjuri, *Hashiyyat al-Bahjuri 'ala sharh al-Ghizzi,* vol. 259.

71. Islahi, Amin Ahsan, *Da'wat-i-Din awr us ka Tariqah-i-kar* (Urdu), chap. 14, 241–242.

72. Al-Bahjuri, *Sharh Sahih Muslim.*

73. Ibid.

74. Bukhari and Muslim.

75. Narrated in Darimi's *Sunan,* and a similar hadith is related in *Musnad* Ahmad.

76. Narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri in Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi.

77. Bukhari.

78. Ghazali in the *Ihya'*. 'Iraqi said that Bayhaqi related it on the authority of Jabir and said: There is weakness in its chain of transmission. According to Nisa'i it is a saying by Ibrahim ibn Ablah.

79. Tirmidhi, Ahmad, Tabarani, Ibn Majah, and al-Hakim.

80. Related on the authority of Abu al-Darda by Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ibn Abi al-Dunya, al-Hakim, Bayhaqi, and Ahmad also related it from Mu'adh ibn Jabal.

20

Letter to Mankind

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

I have been to the center of the earth.
Jules Verne didn't get it right.
It's not down in cavernous bowels of igneous
rock swathed in
sulfurous fumes.
The serpents of the self and its idolized distractions
are the only monsters to
come at you out of the rocks.

I have been to the Ka'ba at Mecca
as pure as a heartbeat, as stunning in time and
space as a precious diamond decreed by God to be
cut by the hand of man to
mirror His Glory.

All is clarity there, and concentration.

The ears are filled with a joyous noise.

The eyes behold God's plan in the
masses of humanity that pass there that
reduce in every case to one: One heart before
One God in one moment in time,
the most public place on earth for the
most private encounter with our
Lord.

I've sat among its people, I've
stood in the first rows of prayer facing
the House, black cloth covering

stone,
I've bowed and prostrated as
swallows wheel in a
  sky so saturated with
light as to scintillate with a jagged
    indelible brightness.

This is still man's major crossroad.

Around the Ka'ba even the worst of men
  for a while
    regain their innocence
  and are renewed.
If they are lost in awe and tears flow and they
    call on Allah with each heartbeat
they are in Paradise.
If they walk around the House of Allah
  chatting and distracted they are
still in God's Garden, so powerful is the
    presence there.

The Ka'ba is of a
blackness that is not black, of a
  dimension that has no
    size, of a
cubeness that has no
  shape in space,
neither size, shape nor color define it,
yet it is
  such-and-such a dimension in
    roughly cube shape with a
golden door set in its side and a
golden rainspout over one edge at the top
made of square blocks of gray stone caulked with
  white and
covered over with fine black brocade to the ground
  embroidered at the top with the
golden calligraphy of God's Word.

Inside it is empty.
(I was there one morning when they
  rolled a wooden stairway to the
  door and opened it and the
    crowd came to a halt and

gasped, and many of us
burst into tears—I nearly
was able to enter, but
dignitaries and pilgrims with special
green cards were the
only ones allowed—
but I saw men in the darkness inside
face the inner wall and do the prayer,
prostrating to Allah from inside facing out in the
holy space we pray towards
every day *outside* facing *in!*)

White and pearly gray marble slabs make a
floor from the Ka'ba to the edge of the
mosque courtyard for the millions of
feet to pace, even the feet of
cats, lean felines of Mecca, one seen
doing the seven prescribed circuits, a
perfect pilgrim of a cat,
before wandering off among the human
multitudes.

Faces float forward from the faces we
bear until I think all the
faces on earth are present there,
even unbelievers, even non-Muslims
represented by the
intensity in the faces of those
who go around God's House—
no one on earth ignored by God, no one
not brushed by
angels' wings, no one
in this creation of His
left in utter desolation, but is
sustained and
conveyed into His
Presence.

This is the heart of the world.

The self of man.

The spirit of our consciousness in
life and death.

Distinctions blurred and distinctions
sharpened at the same time.

Heavens rolled up, seas
dried, earth-prints erased.

No one's gone anywhere.
No one's done anything. No one's

taken a step or even the minutest
breathtaking space of separation
away from the

House of Allah at the

center of the earth of mankind in

space in Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia

January 6, 1996,

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the United

States of America,

3:25 A.M. one cold winter morning

in my bed on earth

at the feast of our Lord.

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Time-Warp*. Reprinted from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

INDEX

‘Abbas ibn ‘Abul Muttalib, 85
‘Abbasid dynasty, 85, 117; ‘Ashura symbolism and rebellion, 112
‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Saud (King of Saudi Arabia), 84
‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al Shaykh (Mufti of Saudi Arabia), 245
‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Baz (Mufti of Saudi Arabia), 245
‘Abd (slave): achievement of, 44, 45; religious mentality, 159–60; worshiper as, 158
‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, 250
Abdur-Rahman (Archangel), 32
Ablutions. *See Wudu* (ablutions)
Abraham, 20, 92; Day of Arafat and, 3; prayer, 2, 20
Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd, 253
Abu Bakr al-Jaza’iri, 220
Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, 42, 94, 114, 242; tomb of, 82
Abu Bakr al-Tamastani al-Farsi, 172
Abu Basir, 230–231
Abu Hamza, 159–61
Abu Hanifa Nu‘man ibn Thabit, 215, 241, 249
Abu Hurayra, 18, 68–69, 90, 244–45
Abu Ja‘far ibn Jarir at-Tabari, 226
Abu Sufyan, 234
Acceptance, Merton and al-‘Alawi, 150
Adab (decorum), 16
Adam, 21–22, 32
Al-‘Adawiyya, Rabi‘a, 175, 177
Adhan (call to prayer): Abraham and, 1–4; newborn babies, 35; words of, 3–4
Adil al-Haqqani, Muhammad Nazim, 39
Afterlife, sunset prayers and, 20
Afternoon prayers. *See Asr* (afternoon prayers)
Agape, 165 n.6
Age requirement for combative Jihad, 237–38
Ahmad (heavenly name of Prophet), prayer symbolism, 34
Ahmad, ‘A’isha bint, 170
Ahmad, Amir, 106
‘A’isha (wife of Prophet), 39, 43, 115, 238; tomb, 82
Akhfa (innermost), 23–24
‘Alawi, 113
Al-Albani, Nasir, 223
Alchemical tradition, 141
Alcohol consumption, 93
‘Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, 47 n.30
‘Alids, 113
‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, 44, 85, 93–94, 113–14
‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abinin, 116
Allah, *dhikr* of, 66–69
Allah ibn Zayd, ‘Abd, 3–4
Al-sa’il (personal self-defense), 220
Al-‘Alawi, Ahmad, 143–55
Amin Ahsan Islahi, 249–50
Amuli, Haydar, 42
Analogical gradations, 162–63
Anarchy. *See Fitna* (mayhem)

Andalusia Inquisition of 1492, 218–19
Angels, prostration before Adam, 32
Annihilation: Gnostic and, 151; station of, 45; Sufi dance, 59; symbolism in prayer cycle, 20–21; union and self-, 161
Ansari clan, 94
Apostates, 253
Appearance, spiritual significance, 28–30
Arabesque design, love as, 139–40
Arabs: Medina indigenous clans, 94; Shiite, 120, 121
Arab society, revolution and women, 188
Arab tribes, 75–76
Art, fear, love and knowledge in, 139–40
Ascension. *See Mi'raj* (ascension)
'Ashura, 111–22; Iran political legitimacy, 119; rituals types of, 121–22; symbolism, 111–12
Asr (afternoon prayers), 20, 21
Assignation of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, 115
'Ata' illah al-Iskandari, 67, 184
Atheists, 63
Attachments, purification from, 23
Attractiveness of evil, 137
Augustine, St., 132
Autumn, 20
Awadh, 120
Awe, servitude and, 169

Bab al-Rahma, 90, 92
Bad *vs* evil, 135
Al-Bahjuri, 249
Bahuti (Imam), 211
Bakka valley, Abraham and, 1
Banu Khuza'a tribe, 234
Al-Baqi', 85
Baqi' al-Gharqad, 84–85
Baqi' Graveyard, 94
Al-Bara'a (enmity for the sake of God), 232
Bara' ibn Malik, 247
Al-Basri, Hasan, 145, 175
Bathing, purification and ritual, 16
Battle of Badr, 86–87, 89
Battle of the Camel, 115, 117
Battle of Karbala, 115–17, 119; 'Ashura rituals and, 121–22
Battle of Siffin, 117
Battle of the Trench, 95
Battle of Yamama, 248
Baudelaire, Charles, 133
Beauty. *See Jamal* (beauty)
Beirut, Lebanon, 189, 191
Belief: 'Ashura and, 112; revelation and, 63–64
Believers, Circle of Unconditional Lovers, 23
Beloved. *See Mahbub* (beloved)
Beloved–lover relationship, 158–59
Birth defects, evil and, 135
Body: purification of, 17; purity and covering, 24–25
Books as *dhikr,* 60–61
Bosnian Sufis, 59–60
Bowing, prayer position symbolism, 34
Buddhism, 54–56, 55, 65
Burckhardt, Titus, 141
Burning the enemy, 242
Al-Buti, Sa'id Ramadan: on combative Jihad, 209, 219–20, 224, 233; on defensive Jihad, 224–25; on Jihad of Education (*da'wa*), 209–12, 233
Buwayh, Mu'izz al-Dawla ibn, 118
Buyids, 118

Caliphate, as governmental system, 113
Caliphs, legitimacy of, 115
Calligraphy, 140
Call of Abraham, 4 n.1; Hajj pilgrim recitation of, 2–3 *See also Talbiya*
Call to prayer. *See Adhan* (call to prayer)
Cairo, Egypt, 187
Carpets, 81, 126
Carret, Marcel, 143–45
Casting of Lots Pillar, 83
Catholic Christians, 140
Celebration. *See Moussem* (celebration)

Celestial bodies, prayer posture and, 29–30
Cemetery: devotional act prohibition, 88; Medina most hallowed, 84–85
Chains, 111, 116, 121
Chants, 55
Character, perfected level, 23
Charity. *See Zakat* (charity)
Children, Yashrutiyya Sufi order and, 180
Christ, 131, 134
Christianity, 134, 170
Christ-like nature, *fitra* (primordial nature) and, 140
Circle(s): about Ka'ba, 2, 21–22, 61; of body, 18; invocation, 180; knowledge, Sufi learning, 178; life part of, 137; of *Qibla*, 23–28; responsibility, 129; spiritual, 126–27; Sufi dance, 58–59, 65
Circle of Unconditional Lovers, 23–24
Clothing: purification of, 17; spiritual conducive, 28–29
Cole, Juan, 120
Combative Jihad, 209, 211, 212–13; authority for declaring, 219–24; as communal obligation, 235; conditions for, 214, 219–31; conduct rules for, 241–48; conscription for, 236–37; continual, against non-Muslims, 232–35; expulsion as grounds for, 226–27; fighters in, 235–38; first instance (legislation) of, 213–15; *fitna* (mayhem) and, 229–30; killing of non-combatants and, 241–42, 243–44, 247, 246–48; between Muslims, 239, 246; peace-seeking obligation and, 239–40; political rebellion as, 239, 249–52; possibility of success and, 229–31; prisoners of war and, 248–49; religious oppression as grounds for, 227–29; self-defense as grounds for, 224–26; suicide attacks and, 244–49; women and, 238
Communal identity, 'Ashura and, 112, 122
Communal prayers, 35
Communication, prayer as unmediated, 9
Companions of the Prophet, 60
Completeness, as divine level of world, 126
Comprehension, by spirit of self, 127
Connection, ritual prayer, 11
Consciousness: of God, 62, 64; transformation of individual, 55
Conscious participation, prayer and, 10
Conscription, for combative Jihad, 236–37
Contrition, as attitude of fear, 139
Conversion, spiritual path and, 140
Covenanters, 217
Covenants, servitude and, 168
Covering: spiritual significance, 25–27; veil, 25, 105–9
Creation: circles of, 129; as doors of heart, 128–29; God and, 65–66; Ka'ba as pole of, 22; prayer posture and, 29–30; as state of prayer, 44
Creativity physical energy, 18
Creator: personal account, 182; prayer in response, 9–10
Creatures, love for God's, 162
Cross-cultural differences, evil and, 136

Daily cycle of prayer, 20
Daily life, prayer in, 34–35
Daily prayers, 13–14; in Medina, 89; number, 41
Da'irat al muhibin (Circle of Unconditional Lovers), 24
Dajjal, Last Days and, 88
Damascus, Syria, 186, 187, 189
Dance. *See Raqs* (dance)
Dar al-Hijra, 76
Dar al-Iman, 76
Al-Dardir, on Jihad, 211, 220, 224
Darkness, veils of, 132
Darqawi, 176
Darqawiyya Sufi order, 176
Al-daru'a (entreaty), 11
Ad-Darqâwî, and Merton, Thomas, 148–49

Dates, Medina, 91
Da'wa (presenting the message of Islam). *See* Education, Jihad of
Dawn prayers. *See Fajr* (dawn prayers)
Day of Arafat, 3
Day of Judgment, 12–13, 21, 30, 82, 85, 129
Day of Resurrection, 17
Death, 129; fear of, 139; Medina graveyard visitation, 84–85; resurrection, 140; spiritual and physical, 154–55
Decorum. *See Adab* (decorum)
Deeds, evil and thoughts, 138
Dervishes, 59
Desirable acts. *See Mustahab* (desirable acts)
Desire (worldly). *See Hubb al-dunya* (worldly desire)
Despoilation, prohibition of, 242–43
Destiny, disobedience and, 44
Destruction, in Name of God, 64
Devil, God and denial of, 133
Dhikr (remembrance), 127; of Allah, 66–69; books as, 60–61; definition, 57; direct, 58–59; door of truth and, 128–29; of God, 63–64; of the heart, 59; heart and, 126; Muhammad science of, 60; as polish of heart, 129–30; shaykh as, 62; silent, 59; standing, 59; Sufi master, 194; Sufi practice, 146–50; true persons of, 64–65
Dhikr al-niswa al-muta'abbidat al-sufiyyat (Memorial of Female Sufi Devotees) (Sulami), 167
Al-Dihlawi, Waliullah, (Shah), 33
Al-Dimashqi, Isma'il, 180
Direction, faced in prayer, 21–22
Direction of prayer, 4; Mosque of *al-Qiblatayn*, 92
Disciple. *See Faqir* (disciple)
Disobedience, as submission to destiny, 44
Distractions, ablution and, 18
Diversity, Islam, 112–13
Divine: pray as ascension to, 42–44; remembrance of, 65
Divine Attributes: of Beauty and Majesty, 26; grace, 28; heart and extinction as, 149; two mystical type of, 159
The Divine Comedy (Alighieri), 131–32
Divine Essence, 28
Divine House, Ka'ba and, 21
Divine inspiration, humans, 63
Divine Names, 58, 158
Divine play, 132
Divine Presence: ablution and, 19; Circle of Unconditional Lovers, 24; mosque symbolism, 36; prayer and, 42; purification of heart, 23; Shadhiliyya Sufi method, 194
Divine Service, 44–46
Divine Unity. *See Tawhid* (Divine Unity)
Diwan (poetry collection), singing of, 57
Doors of heart, 128–29
Du'a (supplicatory prayer), 10–11
Dust, prostration and, 31

Earth (dry), purification rituals, 17
Eckhart, Meister, 140
Ecstatic dance, Sufi, 58–59
Education, for women, 178
Education, Jihad of (*da'wa*), 208–13, 233
Ego. *See Nafs* (self)
Egypt: 'Ashura commemoration, 112; Sufis, 59; women revival movement, 188
Elite culture, 120–21
Emanations, spiritual hierarchy and Divine, 23
Emigration. *See Hijra* (emigration); *Ziyara* (temporary emigration)
Emigration Road, personal account, 75–80
Emotions: eleven levels of, 128; thoughts of heart and, 127
Emptiness, seeker essential, 149–50

Emptying, Sufi and Catholic practices, 140
Energy, spiritual and physical, 18
Enlightened individuals, guide as, 23–24
Enmity (*al-bara'a*, 231
Eradication, of evil, 137
Eros, 165 n.6
Essential. *See Wajib* (essential)
Essential love, 161–62
Eve, 22
Evening prayers. *See Isha'* (night prayers)
Evil: absence of God, 131–38; attractiveness of, 137; eradication, 137; ontological basis of, 131–32; as real force, 132; vs bad, 135
Exaltation of God, servitude and, 169
Existence: Merton and al-'Alawi, 146; as separation, 131; symbolism in prayer cycle, 20–21
Experience, five realms of, 126
Expulsion, as condition for combative Jihad, 226–27
Extinction. *See Fana'* (extinction)
Extra *sunan. See Sunan nafila (*extra *sunan)*
Eyes, veiling of, 25

Face(s): Merton and al-'Alawi, 146; of self and God, 146
Face of God, Islam as seeking, 44
Fahd bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud (King of Saudi Arabia), 80
Faith. *See Al-shahada* (faith)
Al-Fa'iz al-Daghestani, Abd Allah, Shaykh, 40
Fajr (dawn prayers), 20; symbolism, 20
Family of the Prophet, 116–17; graves, 84–85
Fana' (extinction): al-Mursî, Abû'l 'Abbas, 151; as attribute of God, 149; shaykh, as Sufi extinction, 193; Sufi disciples, 196; Sufi states, 193
Faqir (disciple), 156 n.2
Farahi, Hamid Uddin, 223
Fard kifaya (communal obligation), combative Jihad as, 236
Farthest Mosque. *See Al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (Farthest Mosque)
Fatima (daughter of Prophet), 85, 94
Fear: absent from saints, 141–42; blessed state of, 139–42; geometric design and, 139–40; servitude and, 169
Fear of God. *See Makhafa* (fear of God)
Feelings, thoughts of heart and, 127
Feminists, ignorance of Western, 105
Fikr (contemplation): door of truth and, 128; first endless level of heart, 127; heart and, 126
Fiqh al-Sunna (Sabiq), 212, 213
Fire, prohibition on weapons of, 242
First Mind, 33–34
Fitna (mayhem): prohibition against creating, 229–30; as unnatural, 250–51
Fitra (primordial nature): Muhammad and Christian and, 140; original sin as, 136
Five Pillars of Islam: *dhikr,* 61; Hajj as, 2–3; prayer, 9; ritual prayer, 12–13; worship, 42
Flagellants, 111
Flight. *See Hijra* (emigration)
The Flowers of Evil (Baudelaire), 133
Force, evil as real, 132
Forced conversion, prohibition of, 217–18
Forgetfulness of Divine reality, 137
Freedom, Beirut, Lebanon, 191
Free will, 134–35; Islamic concept, 10
Friday noon prayer. *See Jumu'a* (Friday noon prayer)
Friedlander, Shems, 125–30
Funeral prayers: Merton and al-'Alawi, 154–55; sunset prayers and, 20
Futayma, 171

Gabriel (Archangel), 14, 32, 96; Muhammad and, 60
Gate of Mercy, 90
Gaze, covering of, 25

Al-Ghani (the Rich), as divine name, 158
Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, 127, 152; 161; Merton, Thomas and, 148
Al-Ghazali, Ahmad, 161–62
Gifts of the Truth (Yashrutiyya), 176
Glorification, prayer and, 44
Gnosis, Merton, Thomas and, 152
Gnostic: ascent in Sufi practice, 146–47; teachers, 60
God: choice of goodness, 138; Circle of Unconditional Lovers, 23–24; creation and, 65–66; as creator personal account, 182; denial of devil and, 133; destruction in Name of, 64; essential love doctrine, 161–62; evil as absence of, 131–38; four affirmations of greatness, 155; as good, 132; infinity and self-negation, 132; as Light, 28; love, 23–24, 160; as male and female, 172; Names and Attributes, 158; necessary attributes, 149–50; prayer role of, 10; punishment of evil, 136–37; remembrance materialists, 63; sinners sent to Hell, 134–35; spiritual comprehension, 127; spiritual engagement, 167; Sufi extinction, 193; union with, 140; water symbolism and, 18; worldly imperfection and, 135; as Worshiped One, 158
God's Presence, perfection of prayer, 41–44
Gold, 141
Golden Age, 132
Good: God as, 132; reality and supreme, 131
Goodness, God and choice of, 138
Government, caliphate, 113
Grace, Divine Attribute of, 28
Grave(s): Baqi' visitation, 94; Martyrs at Uhud, 86–88; prohibition of worshipping at, 93; visitation of, 84
Groaning, in Sufi practice, 146–47
Guerrilla war, as combative Jihad, 231

Hadra (presence), Sufi dance as, 58–59
Hafiz of the Qur'an, 57, 58
Hagar, 1, 4 n.3
Hajj (pilgrimage), 61; institution of, 2; practice of, 2–4; ritual prayer, 42; as Sufi, 62
Hakki, Ibrahim, Shaykh, 27
Hamshadh, Abu Mansur ibn, 172
Hands, ablution spiritual significance, 18
Hani bint Abi Talib (Umm), 248–49
Haqa'iq al-tafsir (The Realities of Qur'an Interpretation) (Sulami), 168
Al-haqiaqa al-Muhammadiyya (Muhammadan Reality), 28
Haram (prohibited), Ka'ba as, 21–22
Al-Haram (the Sanctuary). *See* Prophet's Mosque
Harrat al-Wabra, 78–79
Al-Hasan al-Shadhili, Abu, Shaykh, 67
Hasan ibn Ali, 85, 113, 115–17
Hatib ibn Abi Balta, 251
Hawa (lust), ablution and, 19
Al-Hayy (The Living One), 58, 64
Heart: ablution and, 18; Arabic words covering, 125–26; as attribute, 149as attribute of God, 149; closing of, 128–29; *dhikr* of, 59; emotional stations and states of, 128; entry into, 126–27; five levels of, 126; level and purification of, 23–24; as mosque, 27; Prohibited Mosque and sanctified, 23; softening of, 62; spiritual guidance, 125–30; spiritual levels within, 127–28
Heavenly bodies: daily prayer, 20; prayer posture and, 29–30
Heavenly kingdom, circles at Ka'ba, 23–24
Hebron, 1
Hell, God sending sinners to, 134–35
Henry, Gray, 131–38
Hermitage, Merton and al-'Alawi, 145
Hidden. *See Khafa* (hidden)
Hidden heart, 128
Highest knowledge. *See Ma'rifa* (knowledge of God)

Hijar Isma'il, 4 n.3
Hijaz Railway, 90–91
Hijra (emigration), 75, 122 n.1
Hindu: chants, 55; doctrine of *lila,* 132; *tamasic* tendency, 137
Hira, 2
History, darkness and, 132
Holy Communion, 140
"Holy war," 205
Hope, servitude and, 169
House of worship, Abraham building of, 1–2
Hubb (love), 160
Hubb al-dunya (worldly desire): ablution and, 19; purification and attachment, 23–24
Hudaybiyya Treaty, 242
Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman, on rebellion against ruler, 250
Humanity, prayer posture symbolism, 30
Humankind, Muhammad as epitome, 28
Human perfection, transformation of life and, 56
Humans, Divine inspiration, 63
"Human shields," 244
Human state, self-purification and, 136
Humility, at Prophet's tomb, 82
Husayn ibn Ali, 113, 115–17, 122; 'Ashura and, 111–12
Al-Husayn ibn Ali, 85

'Ibada (worship), servitude, 168
Ibn 'Abbas, 32, 48 n.47, 209
Ibn al-Farid, 54
Ibn al-Habib ibn al-Siddiq al-Amghari al-Idrisi al-Hasani, Muhammad, Sidi, 54, 62
Ibn 'Arabi, Muhyiddin, 23, 157–58, 177
Ibn 'Ata,' Ahmad, 168
Ibn 'Ata Allah as-Sakandari, 36–38, 39, 40–41, 48 n.46, 49 n.68
Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad, 69, 215, 241
Ibn Jabal, Mu'adh, 235
Ibn Kathir, 118
Ibn Mas'ud, 238
Ibn Naqib al-Masri, Ahmad, 16
Ibn Nujaym, 249
Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 206–7, 210–11, 237
Ibn Qudama, 220, 241
Ibn Rushd, 11, 18, 207–9
Ibn 'Umar, 237–38
'Id al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), 90
Identity: appearance, 28; 'Ashura and Shiite communal, 112; 'Ashura rituals and community, 122; Karbala mourning rituals and social, 119
Idolatry, Wahhabi scholars views, 82
'Ikrima, 238
Imam(s): authority to declare combative Jihad, 219–24 *See also* Leader(s)
Imamate, leadership theory, 114
Imami Shi'ism, 113
Imperfection, 135
Impurity: purification and ritual prayer, 16–17; as tyranny, 27
India, 120
Infinite, finite and, 152
Inner battle, sale of self to God, 169–70
Innermost, level. *See* A*khfa* (innermost)
Intention. *See Niyya* (intention)
Intercessory prayers, of Prophet, 27
Invisible world, *al-malakut* (invisible world), 127
Invocation: Sufi master, 194; Sufi women, 180; transformation, 55
Invocatory formulas. *See Wird* (invocatory formulas)
Iran, 112–13; 'Ashura rituals and Republic of, 119; 'Ashura symbolism and rebellion, 112; Buyids, 118; Shiites and, 112–13
Iranians, Persian elite culture, 120–21
Iraq: Karbala battle, 116; Shiite shires, 121
Isaac, 1
Isha' (night prayers), 14, 20
Ishmael, 21; Abraham and, 1–2

'Ishq (love), 160–61
Islam: Divine Names and, 158; internal diversity, 112–13; moral responsibility, 134; as form of prayer, 43–44; prayer in, 9–11; relationship with non-Muslims, 231–32; servant-hood, 168; servanthood in, 44; study of, as Jihad, 235–36
Islamic knowledge, *dhikr* as, 60
Islamic law, Jihad in, 209–15
Islamic learning, spiritual education as, 192
Islamic mysticism, Merton and, 143–55
Islamist groups, militant, false understanding of Jihad, 224, 244, 253
Isolation from world. *See Khalwa* (isolation from world)
Israfil (Archangel), 32
Ithna' Shi'ism, 113

Jabal 'Ayr, 78
Jabal Sila', 95
Jacob, Merton and al-'Alawi, 152
Ja'far al-Sadiq, 85, 169–70
Jahidu (to strive hard), 206
Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic ignorance): declaring one's own rulings as, 248; rebellion against ruler as, 251,
Jalal (glory), as Divine Attribute, 159
Jamal (beauty): Beloved and, 161–63; Divine Attribute, 26; as Divine Attribute, 159; as divine level of world, 126
Al-Jaza'iri, Abu Bakr ibn, 13
Jerusalem: as direction of prayer, 4, 92; faced in prayer, 22; Muhammad journey, 14
Jesus, 22
Jewish clans, 92–93; Medina indigenous, 79
Jews, Muharram and, 122–23 n.1
Jihad (struggle), 205–55; categories of, 206–9; as combative war (*See* Combative Jihad); defensive, conditions for, 224–26; of Education (*da'wa*), 208–13, 233; of the hand, 208–9; in history and law, 209–15; meaning of, 205, 206; reeducation recommendations, 253; ritual prayer and, 13; against self, 207, 252; of the tongue, 208; of women, 238
Jihad bi-l-sayf (struggle by the sword). *See* Combative war
Jihad in Islam (al-Buti), 209, 211–12, 219–20, 233
Jili (Sufi master), 19, 33–34
John of the Cross, 140
Joseph, Merton and al-'Alawi, 152
A Journey Toward the Truth (al-Yashrutiyya), 176, 190
Joy: Shrine visit and, 108–9; Sufi dance and, 58
Jum'a, 'Ali, 125–30
Jumu'a (Friday noon prayer), 35

Ka'ba: Abraham building of, 1–2; circle about, 2, 21, 22–23, 61; circumambulation of, 3, 61–62; as *dhikr,* 61; direction of prayer, 92; spiritual significance, 23–28
Karbala, 121; Battle of, 115–17; Husayn massacre, 111; Iran political legitimacy and, 119
Kashf al-Qina' (Bahuti), 211
Kashf al-Qina'a (Tahanui), 220
Kashifi, Husayn Va'iz, 118
Kashmir, 120
Katamonu, Turkey, 64
Khadija (wife of Prophet), 14
Khafa (hidden), level of, 24
Al-Khalil, Ghulam1, 159
Khalwa (isolation from world), 193–94
Al-Khamriyya (Ibn al-Farid), 54
Al-Kharaqani, Abu al-Hasan, 162
Khawarij (secessionists), 115
Al-Khudri, Abu Sa'id, 68
Khutba (sermon), 35; 'Ashura rituals and, 121
Kitab al Hikam 'Ata' illah al-Iskandari, 184

Knowledge, 28
Knowledge of God. *See Ma'rifa* (knowledge of God)
Labbayka, meaning of, 3
La ilaha illa'llah, symbolism of, 34
Lamentation. *See Ta'ziya* (lamentation)
Last Days, 88
Last Judgment, pilgrim wearing of *ihram* and, 3
Law, union with God and, 151–52
Lead, 141
Leader(s): authority for declaring combative Jihad, 219–24; call to combative Jihad by, 236; duties in combative Jihad, 229; peace-seeking obligation of, 239–40; prohibition of rebellion against, 239, 249–52
Leader, of circle of lovers, 23
Leadership, imamate theory, 114
Leadership, Rules of (*ahkam al-imama*), 219–20
Lebanon, 112, 186
Legal restrictions, Medina and, 77
Level of the Secret, 24
Life, sacralizing patterns of religions, 136
Light(s): as God, 27–28; heart and metaphysical, 129; kinds of, 129; of Muhammad, 33–34; primordial, 194; Shiraz shrine, 106; world of, 126
Lila, Hindu doctrine, 132
Lings, Martin, 68, 139–40
Litany, in Sufi practice, 146–47
The Living One. *See Al-Hayy* (The Living One)
Lord of Creation, Muhammad and, 45
Love: Arabic terms for, 160; doctrine of essential, 161–62; level on way to God, 23–24; Rabi'a mysticism, 177; Sufi Way, 157–69 *See also Hubb* (love); *'Ishq* (love)
Love of God. *See Muhabba* (Love of God)
Love relationships, Arabic terms for, 160
Lust. *See Hawa* (lust)

Al-Mabsut (Sarakhsi), 221
Madhahib (sects), religious violence and, 157–58
Madhhab (path), 164 n.1
Madness, 128
Maghribi Muslims, 57
Maghrib (sunset prayers), 20, 85
Magnification, consecratory. *See Takbir* (magnification)
Mahbub (beloved), 158; beauty and, 161
Majesty, Divine Attribute, 26
Majesty, as divine level of world, 126
Major impurity, 16
Makhafa (fear of God), 139
Al-malakut (invisible world), 126
Malik bin Anas, 85, 210, 215
Marbub (vassal), worshiper as, 158
Ma'rifa (knowledge of God), 67, 139
Marriage. *See Wisal* (union of marriage)
Martin, Dale B., 170
Martyr (*shahid*), 243–44; Karbala, 116–18; spiritual, 156 n.2; Uhud graves, 86–88
Mary (Virgin), 31
Al-Masjid al-Aqsa (Farthest Mosque), 26–27, 47 n.30
Masjid al-Fadikh (Date Wine Mosque), 92–93
Masjid al-Ghamama (Mosque of the Cloud), 90
Al-Masjid al-Haram (Prohibited Mosque), 26–27; prayer direction and, 21–22
Masjid al-Ijaba (Mosque of the Response), 94
Masjid al-Musalla (Mosque of the Outdoor Feast Day Prayers), 90
Al-Masjid al-Nabawi. *See* Prophet's Mosque
Masjid al-Raya (Mosque of the Battle Banner), 95
Masjid al-Sajda (Mosque of the Prostration), 96

Master–slave relationship, 158–59
Materialists, negation and remembrance, 63–64
Mawardi, and killing of noncombatants, 244
Mayhem (*fitna*): prohibition against, 229–30; as unnatural, 249–50
Mecca, 1, 61; economy, 86; flight to Medina from, 75; as *Hijar Isma'il*, 4 n.3; Muhammad in, and Jihad, 212–13, 214–15, 222; Muhammad's war with, 225, 234
Medina, 4; Arab indigenous clans, 94; as burial place of prophets, 77; economy, 86; graveyard visitation, 84–85; Jewish clans near, 79; modern, 93–94; Muhammad in, and Jihad, 213, 214–15, 222; personal spiritual tour, 75–97; as Prophet's burial place, 77; secondary visiting sites, 89–97; walls of, 79
Meditation, Merton and al-'Alawi, 153–54
Meknès, Morocco, 54, 56–57, 62, 65
Men: circles of invocation, 180; spiritually conducive clothing, 29; Sufi women, 172
Merton, Thomas, 143–55
Messengership, 62
Metaphysics, Merton and al-'Alawi, 150–51
Microcosm of the Macrocosm, 34
Minbar (pulpit), Prophet's, 83
Al-Minhaj (Nawawi), 211
Minor impurity, 17
Miracle of the rock, 95
Mi'raj (ascension), to Divine and prayer, 42–44
Modern society, values inversion, 137
Monotheism. *See Muwahhid* (monotheism)
Moon, 20
Morality: evil vs bad in, 135; society and, 136–37
Moral rectitude, servitude and, 168–69
Moral responsibility, 134–35
Morning prayers, 14
Morocco, 'Ashura commemoration, 112
Moses, 15, 22
A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century (Lings), 143–55
Mosque(s): communal prayer, 35; connection of, 27; function of, 90; in Medina, 89; of Quba, 79–80; Sufi symbolism, 36 –37 *See also* Names listed as Mosque or Masjid
Mosque of *al-Qiblatayn*, 92
Mosque of Quba, 88, 92–93
Mosque of *al-Suqya*, 91
Mosque of the Friday Prayer, 89
Mosque of the Prophet, 4, 26, 77, 80–82, 83–84, 86
Mosque of Victory, 95–96
Most hidden heart, 128
Mount Sila', 92, 95
Mount Uhud, 78; martyrs graves, 86–88
Mourning, for Husayn and martyrs of Karbala, 117–18
Mourning rituals: 'Ashura rituals and, 121–22; *Rawzat al-shuhada'* reading, 118–19
Moussem (celebration), 56–59
Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, 115
Al-Mudawwana al-kubra (Malik bin Anas), 210
Muhabba (Love of God), 139
Muhammad: on best forms of Jihad, 206, 252–53; Bilal, 4; clothing of, 28–29; and combative Jihad, 212–13, 214–15; death and succession, 113–14; on defensive Jihad, 225; *dhikr* science of, 60; epitome of humankind, 28; Gabriel and, 60; Gabriel instruction of, 14; Ghadir Khum speech, 113–14; Hajj institution of, 2; on indiscriminate killing, 246; from Ishmael family, 1; on killing of noncombatants, 248; on labeling wrongdoers as apostates, 252; Muharram fast and, 122 n.1; as niche, 47 n.35; prayer posture

symbolism, 30; on prisoners of war, 248–49; rapture and uniqueness of, 45; on rebellion against ruler, 251–52; ritual prayer, 12–14; self reformation of self and, 140; on suicide, 244–45; tomb of, 81–82; on war and peace between Muslims, 240 *See also* Prophet
Muhammadan Essence, 193
Muhammadan rasulullah, symbolism of, 34
Muhammadan Reality. *See Al-haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya* (Muhammadan Reality)
Muharram: ‘Ashura day of, 111; fast, 122 n.1
Muharram processions, Shiite public mourning, 118
Al-mulakut (invisible world), 129
Al-mulk (visible world), 126, 129
Munaja (supplicate), 10
Muqaddam (representative of Shaykh), 195
Mushahada (witnessing), Sufi levels of, 43
Muslim(s): combative Jihad between, 239, 246–47; servitude and, 170–71; slave and servanthood, 44–45
Mustahab (desirable acts), 16
Mutilation, 242
Muwahhid (monotheism), 92; Medina and, 75–76; Muhammad, 45
My Journey on the Path of Truth (Yashrutiyya), 176
Mysterium fascinans, 159
Mysterium tremendum, 159
Mystical experiences, 161
Mystical philosophers, oneness of Love and, 162

Nafs (self): ablution and, 19; evil and reality of, 133; over coming of evil by, 137; purification of, 136; spiritual engagement and, 167
Najaf, 121
Naqshbandi, 59
Nasr, Hossein, 131–38
National development, as grounds for Jihad, 208
National threat, as grounds for combative Jihad, 214
Nature, evil and, 134
Nawafil (supererogatory prayers), 38–41
Al-Nawawi, Abu Zakariyya Yahiya Ibn Sharaf (Imam), 211
Nazim Adil al Haqqani, Muhammad (Shaykh), 25–26
Nearness. *See Qurb* (nearness)
Negation: evil and, 138; remembrance of God, 63–64
Nestorian Christians, 165 n.6
Niche, 36, 47 n.30
Nida (call upon God), 10–11
Night of Ascension, 18
Night vigil. *See Qiyam al-layl* (night vigil)
99 Beautiful Names and Attributes of God, 10, 18, 28, 61, 130, 140–41
Niyya (intention): differences of, 65; evil and, 133–34; in prayer, 29
Noah, 22
Noble Burial Chamber of God’s Most Honored Envoy, 81, 97
Noncombatants, prohibition on killing, 241, 243–44, 246–48
Nonexistence, symbolism in prayer cycle, 21
Non-Muslim nations, religious freedom for Muslims in, 228
Non-Muslims: covenanters, 217; forced conversion of, 217–18; Islam’s history of protecting, 218–19; Jihad in self-defense against, 225; ongoing war against, 232–35; relationship with, 231–32, 235; religious freedom for, 215–17, 227
Noon prayers. *See Zuhr* (noon prayers)
Nuri, Abu’l Husayn, 159–61

Obedience, servanthood and, 45
Obligations, poor-due, 15
Ontology of evil, 131–32

Original sin, 137; primordial nature and, 136
Ornamentation, of heart, 26–27
Ottoman Empire: Arab Shiite communities, 121; Shiite communities, 121
Ottoman period, Medina, 90–91
Overcoming of evil, self and, 137

Pahlavi dynasty, 119
Palestine, 186, 189
Palestinian emigration, 191
Paradise, 21, 163; garden of, 81; prostrations and, 31
Parents, permission from, for combative Jihad, 238
Peace, obligation to seek, 239–40
Peace: Sufi Way, 157–69; true person of *dhikr,* 64–65
Peace treaties, 239, 240
Penance, ʻAshura rituals, 122
People of the *Qibla,* 23–24
People of the Book: religious freedom for, 215–17, 227 *See also* Non-Muslims
Perfection, vs imperfection in evil, 135
Perfection of prayer, 41–44
Persian elite culture, 120–21
Persian Sufis, 58
Pilgrimage: Abraham and, 1–4; Abraham and Ishmael proclamation of, 2 *See also* Hajj (pilgrimage)
Pilgrims: Call of Abraham and, 2–3; Medina and, 80
Pillar of religion, ritual prayer as, 12
Pillars of Delegations, 83
Poems, Sufi personal account, 184
Poetry. *See Diwan* (poetry collection), singing of
Political authority: as condition for declaring combative Jihad, 219–24 rebellion against, prohibition of, 239, 249–52
Political legitimacy, Karbala and Iranian, 119
Political processes, caliphs selection, 114
Pollution, evil and, 134
Polytheism, 31, 75–76
Polytheists, 216, 229
Poor-due obligations. *See Zakat* (charity)
Positions of prayer, 29–30; inner meaning, 33–34
Practice of the Prophet. *See Sunan al mu'akkada* (practice of the Prophet)
Prajña Paramita Sutra, 54–55
Prayer(s), 9–46; of Abraham, 2; ascension to Divine, 42–44; ascension to servanthood, 45–46; in daily life, 34–35; direction faced in, 21–22; Divine Service and, 43–45; Friday noon prayer, 35; fundamentals, 29; image of Prophet at, 48; at Kaʻba, poem, 7–8; mosques and communal, 35; perfection of, 41–44; positions, 29–30, 33–34; primary aims of, 13–14; Prophetic pattern of, 15–16; Prophet's Mosque, 81; response to Creator, 9–10; as ritual, 11; sincere, 36–38; supererogatory, 38–41; times of daily ritual, 20–22; in traditions of the Prophet, 14; two forms, 10; of women at shrine, 106–9 *See also Salat* (ritual prayer)
Prayer bead(s), 140; levels of recitation, 146; Sufi practice, 146–50
Prayer cycles, 30, 48 n.38
Predestination, 134–35
Premeditation, evil and, 138
Presence. *See Hadra* (presence)
Presence of the Lord, 45
Primordial nature. *See Fitra* (primordial nature)
Prisoners of war, 249–50
Procreation, physical energy, 19
Prohibited. *See Haram* (prohibited)
Prohibited Mosque. *See* Al-Masjid al-Haram (Prohibited Mosque)
Prophet: ascensions of, 42; connection with, 62; family graves, 84–85; *hijra* to Medina, 75–76; image at prayer, 49; intercessory prayers of, 27; leader

of circle of lovers, 23; pleas for mediation, 82; prayers in traditions of, 14; Sufi prayer and, 43; supernatural observations of, 78; tomb of, 77; *'ubudiyya* (servanthood), 34; wives' houses, 83
See also Muhammad
Prophethood, 62
Prophetic pattern of prayer, 15–16
Prophets house, 81
Prophet's Mosque, 4, 27, 77, 86; history, 83–84; personal account, 80–82
Prostration(s): covering of gaze, 25; and nearness, 153–54; prayer and, 29, 31–35, 44
Pseudo-Dionysius, 160
Public mourning, Muharram processions, 118
Public religious practices, Shiite, 111
Punishment, of evil by God, 136–37
Purification: of ego, 136; level of secret and, 23; ritual prayer precondition, 16–17; spiritual significance, 18–23
Purity, covering and, 25

Al Qaeda, 230
Qajar dynasty, 119
Al-qalb (heart), 125–30
Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf: on Jihad, 217; on 9/11 suicide attacks, 246
Qibla (direction), 21–22, 92; people of, 22–23; worshiper focus, 22
Qirafi, on authority to declare combative Jihad, 221
Qiyam al-layl (night vigil), 38–40
Quba, 79
Qur'an: Adam's forehead and, 32; on appearance, 28; on conditions for combative Jihad, 214, 225–27, 228; on covering, 25; *dhikr* of Allah, 60–61; on enmity, 232; on God as light, 27; on Ka'ba, 1–2, 21–22; on killing, 243; on light, 108; on mosques, 35; on peace, 163; on peace-seeking, 239–40; personal letter, 184; prayer, 9–10, 29–30, 43–45; on prisoners of war, 249; Prophetic practice and, 15; on purification, 16–17; recitation, 29, 39, 57, 59–60; on religion, 158; on *salat,* 11–14; on suicide, 244; on sunset and afterlife, 21; union with Beloved, 163; Verse of the Veil, 25; on women, 168
Qur'anic illumination, fear, love and knowledge in, 139–40
Quraysh tribe, 98 n.11, 123 n.1, 233–34
Qurb (nearness): ascension in Sufi prayer, 43; prostrations and, 153–54
Al-Qurtubi, Abu 'Abdullah, 11, 32

Al-Rabb (Lord), as Divine Name, 158
Rafael (Archangel), 32
Raka'at (ritual prayer cycles), 14
Ramadan fast, breaking account, Medina, 85–86
Raqs (dance): Sufi, 57, 58–59; Sufi practice, 146–50
Rawzat al-shuhada' (Garden of the Martyrs) (Kashifi), 118–19
Reality: God punishment of evil, 137; Muhammadan, 28; supreme good and, 131
Rebellion: 'Ashura political symbolism, 112; against political authority, prohibition of, 239, 249–52; Shiite Imams and, 115
Rebirth, symbolism in prayer cycle, 20–21
Recitation: prayer beads level of, 146; *Rawzat al-shuhada'* and mourning, 118–19
Recitation of Qur'an: night vigil, 39; prayer fundamental, 29; Sufi, 59–60
Refuseniks, 63–64
Relativity, of evil, 133
Religion(s): history of darkening of, 132; love and, 157; sacralizing patterns of, 136; as submission, 158
Religious authority, caliphs vs Imams, 114

Religious education, Medina and, 90
Religious freedom: and Jihad, 214, 227–29; for non-Muslims, 215–17, 227
Remembrance. *See Dhikr* (remembrance)
Renaissance (journal): on authority to declare combative Jihad, 221–22; on guerrilla war as combative Jihad, 231
Repentance, 128; as attitude of fear, 139; as emotion of heart, 128; impurity and, 27
Repetition of Names of God: heart and, 126; opening of heart and, 130
Responding to call, 2–3
Resurrection: death, 140; dust of prayers, 31
Revelation: belief, 63–64; world as, 131
Revolution, Arab society, 188
Revolution of 1936, 189
Rightly-Guided Caliphs, 114, 115
Rigor, 139–40
Ritual(s): ablution spiritual significance, 17; ʿAshura, 112, 121–22; of call to prayer, 3–4; of daily prayer, 15–16; greeting of the mosque, 81; of Hajj, 2–3; Iran and importance of, 119–20; mourning and Karbala, 117–18; of purification, 16–18; *Rawzat Khani* as mourning, 118–19; Safavid dynasty and Shiite, 118; *Shabih (taʿziya) Khani,* 119; Shiite and Karbala battle, 116
Ritual prayer. *See Salat* (ritual prayer)
Rub (spirit), lover as, 161
Ruh (soul): engagement with, 167; reformation of, 141–42; three stages of fear in, 139
Rules of Leadership (*ahkam al-imama*), 219–20
Rumi, Mevlana Jalaluddin, 59

Saban-i-Veli, Shaykh, 64–65
Sacralization of life, religion and, 136
Safavid dynasty, Arab Shiite communities, 121
Safavid Dynasty, Shiite rituals, 118
Saints, fear and, 141–42
Salam (peace), 163–64
Al-Salam (the Peacemaker), 163
Salat (ritual prayer), 10, 11; covering of gaze, 25; history of, 14; Merton interest in, 153–54; obligatory, 9, 12–14; Prophetic pattern of, 15–16; Prophet instruction in, 14; *shariʿa* and, 12–17; sincere, 36–38; as summit of worship, 41
Saleem, Shezhad, 230–31
Sale of self to God, 169–70
Salman, Companion of the Prophet, 39
Salman, Nusiyya bint, 171
Salvation: *Rawza Khani* and, 119; servitude purchase of, 169–70
Sanity, ritual prayer and, 12–13
Sarah, 1
Sarakhsi, on authority to declare combative Jihad, 221
Satan, 19–20, 42
Al-Sawanih (Auspicious Omens) (al-Ghazali), 161
Sawm (fasting), ritual prayer, 41
Sayyid Sabiq: on authority to declare combative Jihad, 222; on defensive Jihad, 225; on Muhammad's position on combative *jihad,* 212–14; on peace-seeking obligation, 239; on relationship of Muslims and non-Muslims, 232
Scantification, purpose of life and, 141–42
Scholarly visits, to al-Yashrutiyya, 178
Scholars, Qur'an meaning and, 60
Schools of Islamic jurisprudence: covering and, 25; purification rituals, 16; supererogatory prayers and, 38
Schuon, Frithjof, 140
Scientists, remembrance of God, 63
Secessionists. *See Khawarij* (secessionists)
Secret. *See Sirr* (secret)
Secret of the Secret. *See Sirr al-sirr* (Secret of the Secret)

Sects. *See Madhahib* (sects)
Seekers: essential emptiness, 149–50; essential nothingness, 155; People of *Qibla,* 21–23; women as symbol of, 26
Self. *See Nafs* (self)
Self, struggle against, as Jihad, 207, 252–53
Self-defense, as grounds for combative Jihad, 224–26
Self-inflicted pain, 'Ashura rituals and, 122
Self-mortification, 'Ashura rituals and, 121
Self-pride, prostration and, 31
Self-purification, appearance, 28
Self-sufficiency, as Divine Attribute, 158
Sensory nature, transformation spiritual things into, 129
Separation, evil as, 131
Sermons. *See Khutba* (sermon)
Servant. *See 'Abd* (slave)
Servanthood. *See 'Ubudiyya* (servanthood)
Servitude. *See 'Ubudiyya* (servanthood)
Seventh Heaven, 21
Sexual connotations, Sufi terms, 164 n.3
Al-Shadhili Abu al-Hasan, 43, 176
Shadhiliyya Sufi order, 190; scholarly visits, Yashrutiyya, Palestine, 178
Shadhiliyya Sufi order: method, 194–95
Shadhiliyya tariqa, 176
Al-shahada (faith): obligation of prayer in, 9; ritual prayer, 42
Shame, servitude and, 169
Sharbini, on authority to declare combative Jihad, 221
Shari'a: ritual prayer and, 12–17; Rules of Leadership, 219–20
Al-Sharqiyya, Surayra, 172
Shaykh, as Sufi extinction, 193
Shi'a, meaning of term, 114
Shi'ism: divisions, 113; political influence, 114; spread of, 120
Shiite(s), 85; 'Ashura in, 111–22; communal identity and 'Ashura, 112; meaning of term, 114; Medina indigenous, 93; revolts of, 94; rituals development, 118; Safavid dynasty and, 118
Shiraz, Iran, shrine visit, 105–9
Shoes, 36
Shrine(s): in Medina, 89; Najaf and Karbala, 121; Shiraz personal account, 105–9 *See also* Mosque(s); Tomb(s)
Silat, salat and, 11
Sincere prayer, 36–38
Singing of diwan, 57–58
Sinners, God sending to Hell, 134–35
Sins, rejection and Ka'ba, 22
Sirr al-sirr (Secret of the Secret), 24
Sirr (secret): heart, 128; kinds of, 129; level of, 23; prostration, 31; Sufi master and, 194; world of, 126
Sitting: prayer fundamental, 29; prayer position symbolism, 34
Slave(s): of Christ and of God, 170; glory in servitude, 170; of God as Sufi women, 171; Muslim as being, 44–45
Slavery: Christianity and, 170 *See also 'Ubudiyya* (servanthood)
Slavery as Salvation (Martin), 170
Sobriety, Sufic dance and, 58
Social identities, Karbala mourning rituals and, 119
Social roles, of Sufi women, 171
Society: evil deeds and, 138; moral framework of, 136–37; Sufi women, 170
Songs: Sufi personal account, 184; women Sufi, 189
Soul. *See Ruh* (soul)
South Asia, Persian elite culture and, 120
Spanish Inquisition of 1492, 218–19
Spirit: levels of, 127; levels of heart and, 127
Spiritual aspiration, Merton and al-'Alawi, 144

Spiritual attainment, alchemical tradition and, 141
Spiritual direction, Merton and al-‘Alawi, 146
Spiritual energy, ablution and, 18
Spiritual engagement, 167; covenant with God, 168–69
Spiritual guidance, heart in, 125–30
Spiritual guides, 49 n.50; enlightened individuals as, 23–24; Nazim Adil al-Haqqani, Muhammad, 26, 39
Spiritual hierarchy, Divine emanations, 23
Spiritual masters, as Ka‘ba, 62
Spiritual movement, stages of fear in, 140–41
Spiritual novices, of self and God, 146
Spiritual things, transformation into sensory, 129
Spiritual world, connection of physical, 127–28
Standing: prayer fundamental, 29; symbolism, 34
Standing *dhikr, hadra* as, 59
State: waging of combative Jihad by, 221–22, 229 *See also* Leader(s)
Station of Annihilation, 45
Station of Sainthood, 194
Station of Submission, 45–46
Station of Worship, al-Yashrutiyya personal account, 188
Submission: Arab tribes, 76; of humans to God, 28; Islam as, 45; Ka‘ba and, 62; in prayer, 9, 29, 41; of Prophet, 28; servanthood and prayer, 44–45; as servitude, 168, 172
Succession, Imamate vs caliphate views, 113–15
Successor, Muhammad death and, 113–14
Suffering, non-redemptive as evil, 135
Sufi: closing of heart, 128–29; disciple practices, 194–95; gathering, 57–58; Hajji as, 62; levels of heart, 126; levels of witnessing, 43; love of God, 158–59; Persian, Turkish, and Moroccan, 58; Shadhiliyya method, 194–95; women, 167, 170; zawiya life personal account, 192–95
Sufi masters, 194
Sufi Path, 56, 180
Sufism: invocatory formulas, 55; prayer cycle symbolism, 20
Sufi Way, 157–69
Suicide, prohibition of, 243, 244–45
Suicide attacks, 243–48
Al-Sulami, Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman, 167
Sun, 20
Sunan (supererogatory prayer), 14; *al mu’akkada* (practice of the Prophet), 16; *nafila* (extra *sunan*), 16; personal account, 86; ritual prayer and, 15; slaves of God, 169–70
Sunni: ‘Ashura commemoration, 112; meaning of term, 114–15; Rightly-Guided Caliphs, 114
Sunni–Shiite schism, 112–13; Umayyad Caliphate, 115–18
Sunset, 20
Sunset prayers. *See Maghrib* (sunset prayers)
Supererogatory prayers. *See Nawafil* (supererogatory prayers); *Sunan* (supererogatory prayer)
Supplicatory prayer. *See* Du‘a (supplicatory prayer)
Supreme Throne, 22
Surprise attack, and combative Jihad, 237
Symbolism, Iran and importance of, 119–20
Syria, 113

Ta‘abbud (making oneself a slave), 167
Tahanui, on authority to declare combative Jihad, 220
Takbir (magnification), God and consecratory, 29
Takiya (greater sanctuary), 192
Talbiya, 2–3, 4 n.2
Tamasic tendency, 137
Tantawi, Sayyid (Grand Shaykh), on killing of noncombatants, 246
Tariqa, Shadhiliyya, 58

Tariq(a) (path), 59
Tashahhud (testimony of faith): prayer fundamental, 29; sections of, 34
Tawba (repentance): emptying in Catholic and Sufi practice, 140; evil recognition and, 135
Tawhid (Divine Unity), 161; Muhammad and, 45
Taxation, in peace treaties, 240–41
Tayyiba, Baji (Shaykha), 54
Ta'ziya (lamentation), Karbala story, 119
Teaching, Sufi spiritual, 59
Temple in Jerusalem, 21–22
Temple of Solomon, 47 n.30
Temporary emigration. *See Ziyara* (temporary emigration)
Temptations, evil thoughts and, 138
Terrorism, religious goals and, 157
Testimony of faith. *See Tashahhud* (testimony of faith)
Thought(s): evil and deeds, 138; of heart, 27; temptation to evil, 138
Thrones, world of, 126
Tibetan chants, 55
Times, of prayer, 20
Timur Leng (Tamerlane), 120
Tomb(s): Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, 82; Ahmad, Amir, 106; 'A'isha, 82; Prophet's, 1, 77, 81–82; raised structure prohibition, 84; Saban-i-Veli, Shaykh, 64–65; 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, 82
Traditionalists, twentieth century evil, 133
Traditions of the Prophet, prayers, 15
Transformation: Hajj and, 62; invocation, 55; spiritual things into sensory, 129
Treaty of Hudaybiyya, 233–34
Truth: as doors of heart, 128–29; Joseph and, 152
Turkey, 186–87
Turkish Sufis, 58
Twentieth-century evil, 132–33
Tyranny. *See Zulm* (tyranny)
'Ubudiyya (servanthood): characteristics of, 168; Christian and Islamic, 170–71; *'ibada* (worship) and, 168; meaning of, 45; prayer and, 9–10; Prophet as zenith, 34; rhetoric of, 170; six principles of, 169; slavery, 158; women and theology of, 167–72
'Umar ibn al-Khattab, 47 n.30, 94, 114; tomb, 82
Umayyad Caliphate, 85, 94; 'Ashura symbolism and rebellion, 112; Sunni–Shiite schism, 115–18
Umayyad period, Medina, 89
'Unayza of Baghdad, 171
Understanding, levels of spirit in, 127
Union: prayer and bond of, 43–44; as third state of spiritual movement, 140
Union of marriage. *See Wisal* (union of marriage)
Union with God, 140, 163; al-Mursî, Abu'l 'Abbass, 151–52
Universal Man, 33–34
Universe, remembrance of God, 63–64
'Uthman ibn 'Affan, 39, 85, 94, 114; assignation, 115

Value(s): inversion in modern society, 137; of prostrations, 31
Veil: of darkness, 132; in night vigil, 39–39; personal account, 184, 187; spiritual significance, 25–26; Verse of, 25; women personal spirituality of, 105–9; worship and spiritual significance, 25
Veiling of world, 131
Verse of the Veil, 25
Visible world. *See Al-mulk* (visible world)
Voluntary worship, 38–41
Wadi al-'Aqiq, 78–79
Wadi Buthan, 79, 93
Wadi Qana, 87
Al-Wahhab, Muhammad ibn 'Abd, 84
Wahhabi scholars: *Baqi' al-Gharqad*

funeral structures, 84–85; mediation by Prophet, 82
Wahhabism, on suicide bombings, 245
Wajib (essential), covering as, 24
War: "holy," 205; Jihad as (*See* Combative Jihad)
War' (abstinence), 171
Wars, religion and, 157
Warsh style, 57
Water: purification rituals, 17; symbolism of, 18, 152–53
Well of Aris, 89
Well of the Ring, 89
Well of Zam Zam, 18
Westernization, 191
Western Sufis, 60
Wird (invocatory formulas), 55
Wisal (union of marriage), prayer and, 43
Witnessing. *See Mushahada* (witnessing)
Women, 180; Arab society, 188; Egypt revival movement, 188; in Islam criticism, 171; Jihad of, 238; Karbala role, 116; Muharram procession, 118; shrine visit personal account, 105–9; spiritual knowledge, 178; spiritually conducive clothing, 29; Sufi self-enslavement, 167; Sufi servanthood theology of, 167–72; Sufi singing, 189; Sufi vs Muslim, 167; symbolism of, 25
Women's section: Prophet's Mosque, 84; Shiite shrine, 105–9
Word of God, Qur'an recitation, 57
Work, and Sufi disciples, 196
World: as divine play, 132; levels of, 126–27; Merton and al-'Alawi, 150–51; spiritual–physical connection, 128
Worldly desire. *See Hubb al-dunya* (worldly desire)
World War I, 186–87
World War II, 189
Worship: cemetery acts prohibition, 88; graves visitation, 84; ritual prayer, 42; summit, 41; veil and, 25; voluntary, 38–41
Worshiped One, as Divine name, 158
Worshipers: Divine Attributes and, 28–29; vision and *qibla,* 23
Worshipping: at graves prohibition, 93
Writing, in Jihad, 208–9
Wudu (ablutions): Gabriel instruction of, 14; Merton and al-'Alawi, 152–53; in Mosque of Quba, 88; purification and ritual, 18; spiritual significance, 18–19

Yamama, battle of, 247
Al-Yashruti, 'Ali Nur al-Din, 175–97
Al-Yashrutiyya, Fatima, autobiography, 178–79
Yashrutiyya Sufi order, 176, 180; zawiya personal account, 192–95
Yasin, as heart of Qur'an, 33
Yazid I, Caliph, 115–17
Yemen, 113

Zachariah, 31
Zad al-Ma'ad (Ibn Qayyim), 206–7, 210–11, 237
Zafar Ahmad 'Uthmani, on authority to declare combative Jihad, 222–23
Zakat (charity), 15, 41
Zam Zam, holy well of, 18
Zawiya, 178; Meknès, Morocco, 56–58; visitors, 195–96; Yashrutiyya Sufi order personal account, 192–95
Zaydi Shiites, 113
Zaynab (sister of Husayn), 116
Zen Buddhism, 54–56
Ziyara (temporary emigration), 76–77; guide service, 81–82; Medina traditional protocols, 80–88; secondary visiting sites, 89–97; traditional protocols, 80–88
Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam, 245–46
Zuhr (noon prayers), 20
Zulm (tyranny), impurity as, 27

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Vincent J. Cornell, General Editor
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Contents

Voices of Islam — vii
Vincent J. Cornell

Introduction: Daily Life in Islam — xvii
Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

1. The Fabric of Muslim Daily Life — 1
Susan L. Douglass

2. Islam, Culture, and Women in a Bangladesh Village — 35
Sarwar Alam

3. Marriage in Islam — 57
Nargis Virani

4. The Spiritual Significance of Marriage in Islam — 77
Jane Fatima Casewit

5. Respect for the Mother in Islam — 93
Aliah Schleifer

6. Pregnancy and Childbirth in Islam — 107
Aliah Schleifer

7. The Birth of Aliya Maryam — 113
Seemi Bushra Ghazi

8. Even at Night the Sun is There: Illness as a Blessing from God — 123
Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

9. Caring for the Ill in Islam — 129
Kristin Zahra Sands

10. The Miracle of Pain — 149
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

11. Death and Burial in Islam 151
Rkia Elaroui Cornell

12. Reflections on Death and Loss 173
Feisal Abdul Rauf

13. Die before You Die 179
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

14. Sufi Foundations of the Ethics of Social Life in Islam 181
Kenneth Lee Honerkamp

15. Islam and Business 197
Abdulkader Thomas

Index 223

About the Editors and Contributors 237

Voices of Islam

Vincent J. Cornell

It has long been a truism to say that Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world. However, the situation expressed by this statement is more than a little ironic because Islam is also one of the most studied religions in the world, after Christianity and Judaism. In the quarter of a century since the 1978–1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, hundreds of books on Islam and the Islamic world have appeared in print, including more than a score of introductions to Islam in various European languages. How is one to understand this paradox? Why is it that most Americans and Europeans are still largely uninformed about Islam after so many books about Islam have been published? Even more, how can people still claim to know so little about Islam when Muslims now live in virtually every medium-sized and major community in America and Europe? A visit to a local library or to a national bookstore chain in any American city will reveal numerous titles on Islam and the Muslim world, ranging from journalistic potboilers to academic studies, translations of the Qur'an, and works advocating a variety of points of view from apologetics to predictions of the apocalypse.

The answer to this question is complex, and it would take a book itself to discuss it adequately. More than 28 years have passed since Edward Said wrote his classic study *Orientalism,* and it has been nearly as long since Said critiqued journalistic depictions of Islam in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. When these books first appeared in print, many thought that the ignorance about the Middle East and the Muslim world in the West would finally be dispelled. However, there is little evidence that the public consciousness of Islam and Muslims has been raised to a significant degree in Western countries. Scholars of Islam in American universities still feel the need to humanize Muslims in the eyes of their students. A basic objective of many introductory courses on Islam is to demonstrate that Muslims are rational human beings and that their beliefs are worthy of respect. As Carl W. Ernst observes in the preface to his recent work, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the*

Contemporary World, "It still amazes me that intelligent people can believe that all Muslims are violent or that all Muslim women are oppressed, when they would never dream of uttering slurs stereotyping much smaller groups such as Jews or blacks. The strength of these negative images of Muslims is remarkable, even though they are not based on personal experience or actual study, but they receive daily reinforcement from the news media and popular culture."[1]

Such prejudices and misconceptions have only become worse since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. There still remains a need to portray Muslims in all of their human diversity, whether this diversity is based on culture, historical circumstances, economic class, gender, or religious doctrine. Today, Muslims represent nearly one-fourth of the world's population. Although many Americans are aware that Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, most are surprised to learn that half of the Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan. In this sense, Islam is as much an "Asian" religion as is Hinduism or Buddhism. The new reality of global Islam strongly contradicts the "Middle Eastern" view of Islam held by most Americans. Politically, the United States has been preoccupied with the Middle East for more than half a century. Religiously, however, American Protestantism has been involved in the Middle East for more than 150 years. Thus, it comes as a shock for Americans to learn that only one-fourth of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa and that only one-fifth of Muslims are Arabs. Islam is now as much a worldwide religion as Christianity, with somewhere between 4 and 6 million believers in the United States and approximately 10 million believers in Western Europe. Almost 20 million Muslims live within the borders of the Russian Federation, and nearly a million people of Muslim descent live in the Russian city of St. Petersburg, on the Gulf of Finland.

To think of Islam as monolithic under these circumstances is both wrong and dangerous. The idea that all Muslims are fundamentalists or antidemocratic religious zealots can lead to the fear that dangerous aliens are hiding within Western countries, a fifth column of a civilization that is antithetical to freedom and the liberal way of life. This attitude is often expressed in popular opinion in both the United States and Europe. For example, it can be seen in the "Letters" section of the June 7, 2004, edition of *Time* magazine, where a reader writes: "Now it is time for Muslim clerics to denounce the terrorists or admit that Islam is fighting a war with us—a religious war."[2] For the author of this letter, Muslim "clerics" are not to be trusted, not because they find it hard to believe that pious Muslims would commit outrageous acts of terrorism, but because they secretly hate the West and its values. Clearly, for this reader of *Time,* Islam and the West are at war; however the "West" may be defined and wherever "Islam" or Muslims are to be found.

Prejudice against Muslim minorities still exists in many countries. In Russia, Muslim restaurateurs from the Caucasus Mountains must call themselves "Georgian" to stay in business. In China, being Muslim by ethnicity is acceptable, but being a Muslim by conviction might get one convicted for antistate activities. In the Balkans, Muslims in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia are called "Turks" and right-wing nationalist parties deny them full ethnic legitimacy as citizens of their countries. In India, over a thousand Muslims were killed in communal riots in Gujarat as recently as 2002. As I write these words, Israel and Hizbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political movement and militia, are engaged in a bloody conflict that has left hundreds of dead and injured on both sides. Although the number of people who have been killed in Lebanon, most of whom are Shiite civilians, is far greater than the number of those killed in Israel, television news reports in the United States do not treat Lebanese and Israeli casualties the same way. While the casualties that are caused by Hizbollah rockets in Israel are depicted as personal tragedies, Lebanese casualties are seldom personalized in this way. The truth is, of course, that all casualties of war are personal tragedies, whether the victims are Lebanese civilians, Israeli civilians, or American soldiers killed or maimed by improvised explosive devices in Iraq. In addition, all civilian deaths in war pose a moral problem, whether they are caused as a consequence of aggression or of retaliation. In many ways, depersonalization can have worse effects than actual hatred. An enemy that is hated must at least be confronted; when innocent victims are reduced to pictures without stories, they are all too easily ignored.

The problem of depersonalization has deeper roots than just individual prejudice. Ironically, the global village created by international news organizations such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News may unintentionally contribute to the problem of devaluing Muslim lives. Depictions of victimhood are often studies in incomprehension: victims speak a language the viewer cannot understand, their shock or rage strips them of their rationality, and their standard of living and mode of dress may appear medieval or even primitive when compared with the dominant cultural forms of modernity. In her classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt pointed out that the ideology of human equality, which is fostered with all good intentions by the international news media, paradoxically contributes to the visibility of difference by confusing equality with sameness. In 99 out of 100 cases, says Arendt, equality "will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is 'normal' if he is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he happens to be different. This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous."[3] According to Arendt, the widespread acceptance of the ideal of social equality after the French Revolution was a major reason why genocide,

whether of Jews in Europe, Tutsis in Rwanda, or Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, has become a characteristically modern phenomenon.

The idea of equality as sameness was not as firmly established in the United States, claimed Arendt, because the "equal opportunity" ideology of American liberalism values difference—in the form of imagination, entrepreneurship, and personal initiative—as a token of success.[4] This ideology enabled Jews in America to assert their distinctiveness and eventually to prosper in the twentieth century, and it provides an opportunity for Muslim Americans to assert their distinctiveness and to prosper today. So far, the United States has not engaged in systematic persecution of Muslims and has been relatively free of anti-Muslim prejudice. However, fear and distrust of Muslims among the general public is fostered by images of insurgent attacks and suicide bombings in Iraq, of Al Qaeda atrocities around the globe, and of increasing expressions of anti-Americanism in the Arabic and Islamic media. In addition, some pundits on talk radio, certain fundamentalist religious leaders, and some members of the conservative press and academia fan the flames of prejudice by portraying Islam as inherently intolerant and by portraying Muslims as slaves to tradition and authoritarianism rather than as advocates of reason and freedom of expression. Clearly, there is still a need to demonstrate to the American public that Muslims are rational human beings and that Islam is a religion that is worthy of respect.

Changing public opinion about Islam and Muslims in the United States and Europe will not be easy. The culture critic Guillermo Gomez-Peña has written that as a result of the opening of American borders to non-Europeans in the 1960s, the American myth of the cultural melting pot "has been replaced by a model that is more germane to the times, that of the *menudo chowder*. According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float."[5] At the present time, Muslims constitute the most visible "stubborn chunks" in the *menudo chowder* of American and European pluralism. Muslims are often seen as the chunks of the *menudo chowder* that most stubbornly refuse to "melt in." To the non-Muslim majoritarian citizen of Western countries, Muslims seem to be the most "uncivil" members of civil society. They do not dress like the majority, they do not eat like the majority, they do not drink like the majority, they do not let their women work, they reject the music and cultural values of the majority, and sometimes they even try to opt out of majoritarian legal and economic systems. In Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that left-wing pundits most love to hate. Americans, however, have been more ambivalent about Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, there have been sincere attempts to include Muslims as full partners in civil society. On the other hand, the apparent resistance of some Muslims to "fit in" creates a widespread distrust that has had legal ramifications in several notable cases.

A useful way to conceive of the problem that Muslims face as members of civil society—both within Western countries and in the global civil society that is dominated by the West—is to recognize, following Homi K. Bhabha, the social fact of Muslim *unhomeliness*. To be "unhomed," says Bhabha, is not to be homeless, but rather to escape easy assimilation or accommodation.[6] The problem is not that the "unhomed" possesses no physical home but that there is no "place" to locate the unhomed in the majoritarian consciousness. Simply put, one does not know what to make of the unhomed. Bhabha derives this term from Sigmund Freud's concept of *unheimlich,* "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."[7] Unhomeliness is a way of expressing social discomfort. When one encounters the unhomed, one feels awkward and uncomfortable because the unhomed person appears truly alien. Indeed, if there is any single experience that virtually all Muslims in Western countries share, it is that Islam makes non-Muslims uncomfortable. In the global civil society dominated by the West, Muslims are unhomed wherever they may live, even in their own countries.

This reality of Muslim experience highlights how contemporary advocates of Muslim identity politics have often made matters worse by accentuating symbolic tokens of difference between so-called Islamic and Western norms. The problem for Islam in today's global civil society is not that it is not seen. On the contrary, Islam and Muslims are arguably all too visible because they are seen as fundamentally different from the accepted norm. Like the black man in the colonial West Indies or in Jim Crow America, the Muslim is, to borrow a phrase from Frantz Fanon, "overdetermined from without."[8] Muslims have been overdetermined by the press, overdetermined by Hollywood, overdetermined by politicians, and overdetermined by culture critics. From the president of the United States to the prime minister of the United Kingdom, and in countless editorials in print and television media, leaders of public opinion ask, "What do Muslims want?" Such a question forces the Muslim into a corner in which the only answer is apologetics or defiance. To again paraphrase Fanon, the overdetermined Muslim is constantly made aware of himself or herself not just in the third person but in *triple person*. As a symbol of the unhomely, the Muslim is made to feel personally responsible for a contradictory variety of "Islamic" moral values, "Islamic" cultural expressions, and "Islamic" religious and political doctrines.[9]

In the face of such outside pressures, what the overdetermined Muslim needs most is not to be seen, but to be heard. There is a critical need for Islam to be expressed to the world not as an image, but as a narrative, and for Muslims to bear their own witness to their own experiences. The vast majority of books on Islam written in European languages, even the best ones, have been written by non-Muslims. This is not necessarily a problem, because an objective and open-minded non-Muslim can often describe Islam for a non-

Muslim audience better than a Muslim apologist. The scholars Said and Ernst, mentioned above, are both from Christian backgrounds. The discipline of Religious Studies from which Ernst writes has been careful to maintain a nonjudgmental attitude toward non-Christian religions. As heirs to the political and philosophical values of European liberalism, scholars of Religious Studies are typically dogmatic about only one thing: they must practice *epoché* (a Greek word meaning "holding back" or restraining one's beliefs) when approaching the worldview of another religion. In the words of the late Canadian scholar of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, it is not enough to act like "a fly crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl," magisterially observing another's religious practices while remaining distant from the subject. Instead, one must be more engaged in her inquiry and, through imagination and the use of *epoché,* try to find out what it feels like to be a goldfish.[10]

Through the practice of *epoché,* the field of Religious Studies has by now produced two generations of accomplished scholars of Islam in the United States and Canada. Smith himself was a fair and sympathetic Christian scholar of Islam, and his field has been more influential than any other in promoting the study of Islam in the West. However, even Smith was aware that only a goldfish truly knows what it means to be a goldfish. The most that a sympathetic non-Muslim specialist in Islamic studies can do is *describe* Islam from the perspective of a sensitive outsider. Because non-Muslims do not share a personal commitment to the Islamic faith, they are not in the best position to convey a sense of what it means to *be* a Muslim on the inside—to live a Muslim life, to share Muslim values and concerns, and to experience Islam spiritually. In the final analysis, only Muslims can fully bear witness to their own traditions from within.

The five-volume set of *Voices of Islam* is an attempt to meet this need. By bringing together the voices of nearly 50 prominent Muslims from around the world, it aims to present an accurate, comprehensive, and accessible account of Islamic doctrines, practices, and worldviews for a general reader at the senior high school and university undergraduate level. The subjects of the volumes—*Voices of Tradition; Voices of the Spirit; Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society; Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science;* and *Voices of Change*—were selected to provide as wide a depiction as possible of Muslim experiences and ways of knowledge. Taken collectively, the chapters in these volumes provide bridges between formal religion and culture, the present and the past, tradition and change, and spiritual and outward action that can be crossed by readers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims, many times and in a variety of ways. What this set does *not* do is present a magisterial, authoritative vision of an "objectively real" Islam that is juxtaposed against a supposedly inauthentic diversity of individual voices. As the Egyptian-American legal scholar and culture critic Khaled Abou El Fadl has pointed out, whenever Islam is the subject of discourse, the authoritative quickly elides into the authoritarian, irrespective of whether the voice of authority is

Muslim or non-Muslim.[11] The editors of *Voices of Islam* seek to avoid the authoritarian by allowing every voice expressed in the five-volume set to be authoritative, both in terms of individual experience and in terms of the commonalities that Muslims share among themselves.

THE EDITORS

The general editor for *Voices of Islam* is Vincent J. Cornell, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was solicited by Praeger, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing, to formulate this project, he was director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Cornell has been a Sunni Muslim for more than 30 years and is a noted scholar of Islamic thought and history. His most important book, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (1998), was described by a prepublication reviewer as "the most significant study of the Sufi tradition in Islam to have appeared in the last two decades." Besides publishing works on Sufism, Dr. Cornell has also written articles on Islamic law, Islamic theology, and moral and political philosophy. For the past five years, he has been a participant in the Archbishop of Canterbury's "Building Bridges" dialogue of Christian and Muslim theologians. In cooperation with the Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute, he is presently co-convener of a group of Muslim scholars, of whom some are contributors to *Voices of Islam,* which is working toward a new theology of the religious other in Islam. Besides serving as general editor for *Voices of Islam,* Dr. Cornell is also the volume editor for Volume 1, *Voices of Tradition;* Volume 2, *Voices of the Spirit;* and Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science.*

The associate editors for *Voices of Islam* are Omid Safi and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore. Omid Safi is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Safi, the grandson of a noted Iranian Ayatollah, was born in the United States but raised in Iran and has been recognized as an important Muslim voice for moderation and diversity. He gained widespread praise for his edited first book, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003), and was interviewed on CNN, National Public Radio, and other major media outlets. He recently published an important study of Sufi-state relations in premodern Iran, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006). Dr. Safi is the volume editor for Volume 5, *Voices of Change,* which contains chapters by many of the authors represented in his earlier work, *Progressive Muslims.*

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore has been a practicing Sunni Muslim for almost 40 years. She is director of the interfaith publishing houses Fons Vitae and Quinta Essentia and cofounder and trustee of the Islamic Texts Society of Cambridge, England. Some of the most influential families in Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have supported her publishing projects. She is an accomplished lecturer in art history, world religions, and filmmaking and is a founding member of the Thomas Merton Center Foundation. Henry-Blakemore received her BA at Sarah Lawrence College, studied at the American University in Cairo and Al-Azhar University, earned her MA in Education at the University of Michigan, and served as a research fellow at Cambridge University from 1983 to 1990. She is the volume editor for Volume 3, *Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society.*

THE AUTHORS

As stated earlier, *Voices of Islam* seeks to meet the need for Muslims to bear witness to their own traditions by bringing together a diverse collection of Muslim voices from different regions and from different scholarly and professional backgrounds. The voices that speak to the readers about Islam in this set come from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, and include men and women, academics, community and religious leaders, teachers, activists, and business leaders. Some authors were born Muslims and others embraced Islam at various points in their lives. A variety of doctrinal, legal, and cultural positions are also represented, including modernists, traditionalists, legalists, Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis, and ‘‘progressive Muslims.’’ The editors of the set took care to represent as many Muslim points of view as possible, including those that they may disagree with. Although each chapter in the set was designed to provide basic information for the general reader on a particular topic, the authors were encouraged to express their individual voices of opinion and experience whenever possible.

In theoretical terms, *Voices of Islam* treads a fine line between what Paul Veyne has called ‘‘specificity’’ and ‘‘singularity.’’ As both an introduction to Islam and as an expression of Islamic diversity, this set combines historical and commentarial approaches, as well as poetic and narrative accounts of individual experiences. Because of the wide range of subjects that are covered, individualized accounts (the ‘‘singular’’) make up much of the narrative of *Voices of Islam,* but the intent of the work is not to express individuality per se. Rather, the goal is to help the reader understand the varieties of Islamic experience (the ‘‘specific’’) more deeply by finding within their specificity a certain kind of generality.[12]

For Veyne, ‘‘specificity’’ is another way of expressing typicality or the ideal type, a sociological concept that has been a useful tool for investigating complex systems of social organization, thought, or belief. However, the problem with typification is that it may lead to oversimplification, and oversimplification is the handmaiden of the stereotype. Typification can lead to oversimplification because the concept of typicality belongs to a structure of general knowledge that obscures the view of the singular and the different. Thus,

presenting the voices of only preselected ''typical Muslims'' or ''representative Muslims'' in a work such as *Voices of Islam* would only aggravate the tendency of many Muslims and non-Muslims to define Islam in a single, essentialized way. When done from without, this can lead to a form of stereotyping that may exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the tendency to see Muslims in ways that they do not see themselves. When done from within, it can lead to a dogmatic fundamentalism (whether liberal or conservative does not matter) that excludes the voices of difference from ''real'' Islam and fosters a totalitarian approach to religion. Such an emphasis on the legitimacy of representation by Muslims themselves would merely reinforce the ideal of sameness that Arendt decried and enable the overdetermination of the ''typical'' Muslim from without. For this reason, *Voices of Islam* seeks to strike a balance between specificity and singularity. Not only the chapters in these volumes but also the backgrounds and personal orientations of their authors express Islam as a lived diversity and as a source of multiple wellsprings of knowledge. Through the use of individual voices, this work seeks to save the ''singular'' from the ''typical'' by employing the ''specific.''

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a major figure in the field of Subaltern Studies, notes: ''Singularity is a matter of viewing. It comes into being as that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category.''[13] For Chakrabarty, the singular is a necessary antidote to the typical because it ''defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination.''[14] Because the tendency to overdetermine and objectify Islam is central to the continued lack of understanding of Islam by non-Muslims, it is necessary to defy the generalizing impulse by demonstrating that the unity of Islam is not a unity of sameness, but of diversity. Highlighting the singularity of individual Islamic practices and doctrines becomes a means of liberating Islam from the totalizing vision of both religious fundamentalism (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) and secular essentialism. While Islam in theory may be a unity, in both thought and practice this ''unity'' is in reality a galaxy whose millions of singular stars exist within a universe of multiple perspectives. This is not just a sociological fact, but a theological point as well. For centuries, Muslim theologians have asserted that the Transcendent Unity of God is a mystery that defies the normal rules of logic. To human beings, unity usually implies either singularity or sameness, but with respect to God, Unity is beyond number or comparison.

In historiographical terms, a work that seeks to describe Islam through the voices of individual Muslims is an example of ''minority history.'' However, by allowing the voices of specificity and singularity to enter into a trialogue that includes each other as well as the reader, *Voices of Islam* is also an example of ''subaltern history.'' For Chakrabarty, subaltern narratives ''are marginalized not because of any conscious intentions but because they represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional

history."[15] Subaltern narratives do not only belong to socially subordinate or minority groups, but they also belong to underrepresented groups in Western scholarship, even if these groups comprise a billion people as Muslims do. Subaltern narratives resist typification because the realities that they represent do not correspond to the stereotypical. As such, they need to be studied on their own terms. The history of Islam in thought and practice is the product of constant dialogues between the present and the past, internal and external discourses, culture and ideology, and tradition and change. To describe Islam as anything less would be to reduce it to a limited set of descriptive and conceptual categories that can only rob Islam of its diversity and its historical and intellectual depth. The best way to retain a sense of this diversity and depth is to allow Muslim voices to relate their own narratives of Islam's past and present.

NOTES

1. Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), xvii.
2. *Time,* June 7, 2004, 10.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* rev. ed. (San Diego, New York, and London: Harvest Harcourt, 1976), 54.
4. Ibid., 55.
5. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The New World (B)order," *Third Text* 21 (Winter 1992–1993): 74, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 313.
6. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 13.
7. Ibid., 14–15.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, U.K.: Pluto, 1986), 116. The original French term for this condition is *surdéterminé*. See idem, *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 128.
9. Ibid., 112.
10. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7.
11. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 9–85.
12. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology,* trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 56.
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 82.
14. Ibid., 83.
15. Ibid., 101.

Introduction: Daily Life in Islam

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

One always hears Muslims say, "Islam is a way of life." What does this mean? If we entered a Christian home in Louisville, Kentucky, and spent a day with a family, what would we learn about Christianity? Spending a day in a home in Cairo, Egypt, will surely teach us something important about Islam because so much of daily life occurs within the framework and practice of Islam. The chapters in this volume provide the reader with a taste of what is meant by the statement, "Islam is a way of life."

At dawn one hears from the nearest minaret the *adhan,* the call to prayer broadcast by microphone over the surrounding neighborhood: *Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!*

God is most great! God is most great!
God is most great! God is most great!
I testify that there is no god but God.
I testify that there is no god but God.
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.
Come to prayer! Come to prayer!
Come to success! Come to success!
God is most great! God is most great!
There is no god but God!

As the birds begin to chirp and the mourning doves begin to coo, the members of the family make their way to the washroom to perform their ablutions (*wudu'*) before prayer. This purification is a conscious preparation made in advance in the act of standing before God. At dawn, the ablutions bring one fully into wakefulness, washing away the traces of sleepiness; during the daytime they serve as a transition between the mundane activities of the world and prayer. One makes *wudu'* in order to stand cleansed before God, but *wudu'* is not merely a physical washing. Externally, *wudu'* is the washing of the extremities, which would normally get dirty or dusty from being out in the world: hands (right hand first), mouth, nose, face, arms

(right arm first), head, ears, neck, and feet (in this order). However, there are many ways for us to become "dusty" when out in the world. Our hearts can become dusty too.

The following story is often told to Muslim children to familiarize them with the deeper meaning of ablutions in Islam:

> A well-known Muslim scholar was about to go to bed one night when he heard a knock on the door. On his front porch was an old man in ragged clothing and with a torn blanket over his shoulders. The scholar inquired, "Can I help you with anything?"
>
> The old man said, "I'd like for you to teach me to do *wudu'*."
>
> Shocked and a bit annoyed, the scholar said, "What? In all these years has no one taught you to perform the daily ablutions?"
>
> "Yes, my father taught them to me when I was a boy, but you are a wise man and I would like to learn from you."
>
> So the scholar quickly began explaining the motions of the *wudu'*. But the old man persisted, "Please, I would like for you to show me."
>
> The scholar thought, "Can this old man not even understand simple language? Oh, I'll go ahead and show him just to get this over with." So the scholar welcomed the old man in, took him to the sink and began going through the motions quickly, explaining each one.
>
> Afterward, the old man said, "Now I will do the *wudu'* to make sure that I have understood correctly." But the old man proceeded to get everything wrong!
>
> The scholar exclaimed, "No! No! That's all incorrect! Were you not watching? Did you not understand?"
>
> The old man said simply, "I guess you were not able to teach me how to do *wudu'* properly," and he left.
>
> Bewildered but curious, the scholar asked his doorman if he knew the old man. His doorman said "Yes, of course! That is the great saint of our city, well-known all across the Muslim world!"
>
> Shocked and ashamed, the scholar rushed out and went to the house where the saint was known to live. He knocked on the door. When the saint opened it, the scholar knelt at his feet and said, "Please forgive me. Please, sir, teach me to do *wudu'*."
>
> The saint said the following, "There is no need to ask my forgiveness. But there is something you should understand. When you were trying to teach me about *wudu'*, you were talking all the time. That is wrong. When you do *wudu'*, you should concentrate on the ablution alone. You should be praying to Allah to forgive you whatever sins you have committed. You were not doing *wudu'*, you were just washing yourself. *Wudu'* must be done with concentration and repentance. Remember that."[1]

The saint then proceeded to explain that as one washes one's hands, one prays, "Oh God, forgive me for the thoughtless and wrong deeds that I have committed and let what I do from now on be pleasing in Thy sight." As one rinses out the mouth, he implores, "Forgive me for all that I have said that has been low and heedless and may everything I say from now on be

permeated with goodness and love.'' When one wipes the ears, one asks of the Lord, ''Please let me only listen to what is blessed and prevent me from opening myself to the hearing of faults and unmerciful chatter!'' When wiping the top of one's head, the worshipper should request that God purify his own thoughts and intention so that he may better serve His Creator with humility. As the feet are cleaned, the believer mindfully concentrates on where his feet take him and prays, ''Oh Lord, let all of my movements take me nearer to Thy Divine Presence and not in the direction which distances my soul from You.''

The ablution in Islam is performed with the intention of asking for forgiveness and renewal—of becoming clean for prayer, when we draw near to God. If you were preparing to spend time with a very important person for whom you had much respect, you would shower and make yourself as presentable as possible. If we take such care for people in this realm, we must surely do the same for God; a physical and mental washing is the very minimum we can do. The following story told by a friend of mine illustrates the importance of preparing with care for the meeting with God:

> A teenage daughter and her friend were going out to meet some friends at a café, but wanted to perform the midday prayer beforehand because they would be out for the greater part of the afternoon. They quickly made their ablutions, and to save time, they threw towels over their heads instead of going upstairs to get their head scarves, as they were only praying among themselves in their own home. They then went into the living room, where the mother was also about to pray.
>
> The mother saw the towels on their heads and asked, with a disapproving eye, ''What is this?''
>
> The daughter replied, ''Oh mother, we had to be downtown five minutes ago! We're in our own home! Does it really matter?''
>
> The mother replied, ''Imagine you were going to meet the Queen of England, would you walk into the palace and right up to her throne to greet her looking like that? No, you would be ashamed. You would take hours to prepare and you would dress up in your very best. This is not the Queen of England you are about to meet. It is God. The King of Kings, the very meaning and source of kinghood and queenhood!''

The point of this story is not that Muslims should spend hours preparing for prayer, but rather to stress the importance of the consideration and care one takes before approaching the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

Visitors to the Muslim world are struck by the five prayers that Muslims perform each day and how much prayers are respected by everyone in the society. When a person is being praised it is more common to hear, ''He never misses his prayers,'' than ''He is the CEO of this or that company.'' Often, one will hear, ''Well, if we're going to play tennis at the club at four o'clock, we could do the afternoon prayers at a place beforehand, and then be finished in time to do the sunset prayers at such-and-such a place

afterward." It is wonderful to see an entire day organized around prayer. It is quite a surprise to be in a busy office and notice that the secretary suddenly stands up from her typing and lays out her prayer rug next to her desk and proceeds to pray. At prayer times, hallways in office buildings stand in for mosques. Prayer is part of the normal flow of daily life.

Muslims often mention how good it is that the five canonical prayers interrupt the daily routine, allowing one to step away from the day's problems and enter into a time and space where one can breathe freely and get in touch, at least for a few minutes, with the sweetness of Ultimate Reality. If a person is talking with a friend about last night's dinner party, for example, and he hears the *adhan,* the call to prayer, immediately he becomes aware of the contrast between the burdensome reality in which he remains and the sacred, freeing space to which he is being called, between the narrowness of the secular world and the expansiveness of the Sacred. When a person is undergoing personal difficulties he may hold, for a while, the position of the prostration (*sajda*) where the forehead touches the ground and one is the most low before God the Most High. At such times, a Muslim has ample opportunity to recognize the reality of human dependence on Divine Mercy.

But, what of the time between the prayers? Does the rest of our life become secular and separate from the atmosphere of prayer? Of course, we may forget the beauty we experience in prayer, but ultimately, the five prayers are reminders of how we should live always, throughout the day and night. Our suffering comes from our distance from God, and our distance truly lies in our forgetfulness. The famous Muslim scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali wrote that we should live our lives as if, in one week, the King were coming to stay as a guest in our house. How would we keep house if we knew that the King was coming? And how would we "keep house" if the King was coming to visit the house of our heart? In Islam, the believer must do her best to live impeccably on all levels, always with God in mind.

One way in which this mindfulness becomes apparent is through language. Another thing that strikes the Western visitor to the Muslim world is the frequency with which God is mentioned in ordinary conversations. If you seem a bit agitated, someone may turn to you and quietly counsel, "God is with the one who is patient." If you undergo a trying experience, someone may state, "Put your trust in God." If you are worried about the success of an endeavor, someone may chime in, "God is Powerful over all things." Whenever you admire a possession or a child that belongs to another person, you must be sure to state *Ma sha' Allah* (This is what God has willed) in order to prevent the appearance envy or covetousness. One hears *In sha' Allah* (God willing) all the time in the Muslim world, since one would not dare presume that one's hopes or plans will automatically turn out as one expects; they will only happen if it is the will of God.

The phrase that one hears most often—sometimes in every sentence—is *al-Hamdulillah* (Praise be to God). The reason for this is as follows. As

Muslims, we must be thankful to God for all God gives us in our lives, including both blessings and trials. Instances of success and failure are like course adjustments that always bring us closer to the Center. If we treat all that occurs in our lives as gifts from God, as opportunities for spiritual realization, and accept them with gratitude, we can witness our life as part of an ongoing process of drawing closer to the Creator. It is deeply moving to be present when someone who has just lost a child or has received dreadful news says, *al-Hamdulillah,* praising God with all his heart. The following folk tale illustrates the seriousness with which this attitude of thankfulness is taken in Islam:

> A merchant of Cadiz went to the dock one day to receive his merchandise, which was scheduled to arrive that morning from Tunis. Upon his arrival he was told, "The boat with all of your cargo was shipwrecked and everything was lost." The merchant looked down in the direction of his heart, then looked back up at the man and said, "*al-Hamdulillah.*"
>
> A week later, the merchant received a knock at the door. When he opened it, he saw the man from the dock at his doorstep. He said, "Sir, I was mistaken! It was another boat that shipwrecked last week! The boat with all of your cargo landed safely this morning. Nothing was lost."
>
> The merchant again looked down toward his heart, and then looked back up at the man and said, "*al-Hamdulillah.*"
>
> The man asked, "Why do you always look down first and then say *al-Hamdulillah*?"
>
> The merchant replied, "In order to make sure that there is no change in my heart—whether I have lost everything or lost nothing—that I am truly grateful to God for whatever He decides to give me in this life."

The attitude of Muslims all over the world toward the treatment of the elderly is enviable. In the Islamic world, there are no old people's homes. The strain of caring for one's parents in this most difficult time of their lives is considered an honor and a blessing, and an opportunity for spiritual growth. God asks that we not only pray for our parents but also act toward them with limitless compassion, remembering that when we were helpless children they preferred us to themselves. Mothers are particularly honored: the Prophet Muhammad taught, "Paradise lies beneath the feet of the mothers." When they reach old age, Muslim parents are treated mercifully, with kindness and selflessness.

In Islam, serving one's parents is a duty second only to prayer, and it is the right of the parents to expect it. It is considered despicable to express frustration when, through no fault of their own, the old become difficult to manage. The Qur'an says: "Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and be kind to parents. If they reach old age with you, do not say 'Uff!' to them or chide them, but speak to them with honor and kindness. Treat them with humility and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on them for they cared for me when I was little'" (Qur'an 17:23–24).

This volume contains many excellent chapters that will help clarify the nature of personal, family, and commercial life in the Muslim community. In "The Fabric of Muslim Daily Life," Susan L. Douglass investigates what living a day-to-day life as a Muslim really means. She also looks at other societies that do not function within a God-centered framework and discusses the challenges that Muslims face living in such societies. In her chapter, the reader follows a Muslim from the time of arising at dawn through the sacred rhythm and cycle of the day's devotions and activities. Matters discussed include Islamic dress—with considerable discussion of the issue of women's covering—hygiene, permissible food and fasting, public and private activity, family and marital relationships, and the natural world in the view of Islam.

In "Islam, Culture, and Women in a Bangladesh Village," Sarwar Alam separates the reality of Islamic social life from its scriptural ideals and portrays some of the struggles that Muslim women face in the South Asian country of Bangladesh. By presenting the results of original research that he conducted in Bangladesh in 2005, Sarwar demonstrates the influence of adapted perceptions and customary patterns on the way that the scriptures of Islam are understood on the ground. He provides important information on many aspects of social life, including marriage and divorce, inheritance, *parda* (called *purdah* in other South Asian countries), purity and pollution, and the important role of the *shalish,* the village council, in restricting the political and social roles of women in Bangladesh's rural communities. In this chapter, rural women of Bangladesh speak with their own voices through excerpts of hundreds of hours of recordings that Sarwar made during his research. In different ways, they express a sentiment that Sarwar uses to conclude his chapter: "What God gives, a man can take away."

In the chapter "Marriage in Islam," Nargis Virani provides some of the scriptural and legal background for the domestic relations discussed by Sarwar Alam in the previous chapter. Virani discusses the terminological meaning of marriage in Islam, the nonsacramental nature of the marriage contract, the form and stipulations of the contract, and preferred and forbidden marriage partners. She also discusses the Twelver Shiite practice of temporary marriage (*mut'a*), which differs considerably from the permanent marriages contracted by both Sunnis and Shiites. Perhaps the most intriguing part of her chapter is the final section "The Personal Voice: Growing Up in a Polygynous Household," in which she discusses her own experience of growing up in a household where her father had two wives, and her difficulties in expressing what it means to have "two mothers" to immigration authorities and others in the West.

In "The Spiritual Significance of Marriage in Islam," Jane Fatima Casewit expands upon the points made by Virani and discusses the role that Islamic marriage can play in the development and purification of the soul. The purification of the soul is the underlying purpose of Islamic legal prescriptions and is a major goal of the Islamic way of life. If the dissolution of the ego is

needed for the attainment of humility and perfect service to God, then marriage provides a perfect opportunity for practicing self-sacrifice, loving mercy, and generosity. Starting from the Qur'anic verse, ''And of everything [God] created a pair'' (Qur'an 51:49), Casewit explains how the complementarity of man and woman in marriage mirrors the divinely ordained duality that can be found in many aspects of existence. She ends her chapter by discussing marriage and motherhood, bringing up the divine tradition: ''I am God and I am the Merciful. I created the womb and I gave it a name derived from My own name. If someone cuts off the womb, I will cut him off, but if someone joins the womb, I will join him to Me.''

In ''Respect for the Mother in Islam,'' Aliah Schleifer—may God's mercy shine upon her in the next world—continues the discussion of motherhood in Islam that is started by Casewit. This chapter and the one by Schleifer that follows it, ''Pregnancy and Childbirth in Islam,'' are surveys of motherhood, pregnancy, and childbirth as presented by the most important sources of Islamic teachings and regulations: the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence. Schleifer also provides discussions from selected works of the classical tradition of Qur'anic exegesis in Islam. In ''The Birth of Aliya Maryam,'' Seemi Bushra Ghazi describes movingly and poetically her own experience of childbirth as a Muslim woman of South Asian origin. Her evocation of the Virgin Mary during her periods of pregnancy and childbirth is particularly beautiful. It is also touching to learn what it means to a Muslim woman to have lost children that were born before their time.

In Islam, whenever Muslims suffer the trial of illness, they are taught to see this experience as a great blessing and an opportunity for the purification of the soul. Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore in ''Even at Night the Sun is There: Illness as a Blessing from God'' describes how her understanding of this outlook carried her through a painful and frightening experience of paralysis. In ''Caring for the Ill in Islam,'' Kristin Zahra Sands tells the poignant story of what it means spiritually to care for a child who struggles with spina bifida and epilepsy. Through her study of the great Islamic saints and mystics, she presents us with multiple levels of giving and caring. The final stage of utterly selfless giving—which is the aim for every person of faith—recalls the example brought to humanity by all of the prophets of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic religious tradition. If we are able to give of ourselves in such a complete and perfect way by truly caring for each other, we will experience the presence of God infusing our very being.

Of all human experiences, life and death are the most important ones that are shared by all people, regardless of religion or origin. In ''Death and Burial in Islam,'' Rkia Elaroui Cornell describes the attitudes and rituals associated with death and dying. As a way of introducing her discussion, she takes the reader along for the ride as she prepares to wash and wrap for burial the body of a young Muslim bride who had suddenly died in Los Angeles, California. In her chapter, she discusses how Muslims deal with death, including suicides

and murders, how Islamic tradition describes the experience of death, the nature of the soul and its ascent after death, the reality of the Hereafter, the terrors of the graveyard (especially fascinating are the Moroccan legends of the She-Mule of the Graveyard and ''Ali Wants His Hand Back''), the preparation of the body for burial, and the Islamic burial service. In ''Reflections on Death and Loss,'' Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf reflects on the death of his father, a noted Imam and Islamic scholar in the United States, and the tragedy of the earthquake and tsunami of December 2004, which took over 100,000 Muslim lives.

The final two chapters in this volume address personal and social life through the prism of Islamic ethics. Kenneth Lee Honerkamp's ''Sufi Foundations of the Ethics of Social Life in Islam '' starts with the maxim, ''Sufism is ethical conduct. Whoever surpasses you in ethical conduct, surpasses you in Sufism.'' He goes on to show how the Sufis combined an ethical *via activa* with their spiritual *via contemplativa.* In doing so, they followed the teachings of the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, and early Muslim leaders (*al-Salaf al-Salih*), who continually stressed the complementarity of knowledge and action and the inner and outer dimensions of existence and human responsibility. Particularly important to this tradition were the teachings of the Sufi saint-exemplar, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE), who developed in his followers a deep awareness of the moral consequences of their behavior. Honerkamp heavily draws upon the writings of this tenth-century Sufi to make his point. He provides the reader with a fresh perspective on how and why the teachings of the saint-exemplars of Islamic spirituality continue to resonate within the lives of contemporary Muslims and why these teachings remain as relevant today as they were centuries ago.

Abdulkader Thomas also stresses the interrelationship between ethics and spirituality in the chapter, ''Islam and Business.'' We must not forget the material and mercantile sides of daily life in Islam, which may also be viewed in terms of God's will and justice. Thomas demonstrates to the reader how a concern for the eternal life of the soul is key to understanding the Islamic ethics of business transactions, including banking and investment. If a person takes seriously the role of steward of God's creation and believes that all wealth is a trust given to humanity by God, the businessperson has deep reasons for realizing what Thomas speaks of as a ''win–win'' situation in commercial affairs. Of particular ethical importance to this endeavor are the avoidance of unlawful profits (*riba*) and various forms of deception (*gharar*) in the practice of business.

For those who know the Islamic world well, what is perhaps so deeply touching about their experiences in this region is the absence of a strictly secular perspective, and the warmth and sweetness of people that literally *live* Islam in their daily lives. These are people who submit to God's Divine will with peace of heart and joy of spirit. The chapters in this volume, along with the exceptional poems by the American Muslim poet Daniel Abdal-Hayy

Moore, provide the reader who has never lived in the Muslim world an opportunity to feel this warmth and taste this sweetness for himself or herself.

NOTE

1. Janet Ardavan, *Growing Up in Islam* (Essex, United Kingdom: Longman, 1990), 15.

1

The Fabric of Muslim Daily Life

Susan L. Douglass

It is common to speak of Islam as a "way of life." This means that Islam is more than merely a religion or a set of rituals. Islam is a blueprint for life. Its architect is the Creator and its contractor, Muhammad the final Messenger of God, built a house according to that blueprint and lived in it on earth, as did God's previous Messengers from Jesus to Adam. According to the teachings of the Prophets, religion is not a summer home that may be opened for an occasional visit, to be closed and ignored at other times. Being a Muslim means being a person who constantly strives to submit and draw near to the One God, *Allah. Muslim,* the term for a follower of Islam, thus does not denote a fixed or secured status, nor is it merely a cultural identity to be distinguished from other identities. Rather, it is a process. Submitting to God (*Islam*) means making the effort (*ijtihad,* from the same Arabic root as *jihad*) to have knowledge of God, to follow the guidance humankind has been given throughout human history, and to realize it in every aspect of life. Religion belongs to God, not to human agency. In short, Islam is something one does; it is not something that one possesses. As the Qur'an reminds us:

> It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward East or West. But it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made; to be firm and patient in suffering and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the People of Truth, the God-Fearing.
>
> (Qur'an 2:177)

THE NEED FOR A GOD-CENTERED LIFE

Regardless of a person's wealth, poverty, prominence, or involvement in society, everyone lives within a personal and intimate sphere that can be

called ''daily life.'' Daily life is the fabric in which we wrap ourselves. It is also the surface on which we tread, as we move back and forth from private to public spheres. It is the scene where we perceive time as passing heavily or lightly. This time is spent in the presence of the humble self and with people who are most familiar, engaged in the ordinary process of meeting life's needs on a simple or a grand scale. Daily life is also the field on which we live a God-conscious life. It is the main testing ground for such a life, the distinguishing area between sincerity and outward trappings. Either the principles that inform the Shari'a, the Law of Islam, find their implementation in daily life or they remain underutilized ideals.

The God-conscious life is not a prison, nor should it be thought of as an extreme way of life. Many people today have become accustomed to thinking of religion as just one part of life, a segment that may be viewed as desirable or undesirable, bounded by a perception that religion is a limited engagement. A widespread view of moderation in religion is that the ''Religion'' indicator light on our personal dashboard should not remain on all the time. Remaining on all the time means that our commitment to religion is excessive or extreme. This separation of religion from daily life was an outgrowth of the struggle in the Christian West to overcome the power and authority of religious institutions, which were perceived as a drag on scientific and social progress. The struggle between religion and science is far from over today. However, the clear victory for science in fields such as astronomy, geology, and physics has led to a backpedaling by historically transformed and weakened religious institutions and has led to the compartmentalization of religious belief. Efforts by ethicists to maintain the links between science and religion have been hampered by this compartmentalization. In the political and social realms, the battles over religious tolerance, human rights, and participatory government have widened the rift between religious and secular authority. The continuing perception that religion is an outmoded cultural artifact and a cause for conflict has given credence to the idea that secularization is a desirable goal for human society. Globally, religion has a bad name. With the rising power of nation-states, the ideas of modernization, secularization, and imperialism have become components of a political project whose object seems to be the elimination of religion as a meaningful part of life. Other than the former communist societies' internal efforts against religion, nowhere has this antireligious project been aimed with more potency than against the religion of Islam.

The contemporary discourse about religion is full of contradictions. It remains unclear what secularization is supposed to achieve, or how the religious bathwater is to be thrown away, leaving a healthy secular baby. Often, a person is considered a fundamentalist if she appears to practice her religion at all, especially if she dresses differently or refuses to participate in certain social activities and forms of entertainment, such as drinking alcohol and gambling. It is a common notion that the exercise of free will is restricted

by having a comprehensive set of rules to live by, or a demanding set of rituals to perform. Some people are convinced that most rules and rituals are artificial and that individuals should not have to rely on such programming in their daily lives. In addition, many argue that religious ways of life are out of date and are counterproductive or even destructive to human welfare and progress.

Before rejecting the argument for the validity of a God-centered framework for life based on submission to God and the authority of revelation, one should consider the alternative. Today's society demands a great deal from the individual soul. Exposure to electronic media entails significant and pervasive psychological demands. Consider the following familiar vignette: an average adult in a developed country wakes up to a clock radio or a mechanical alarm. The abrupt transition from the bed to the outside world might be postponed a little until she enters the kitchen, the car, or the workplace, but it comes all too soon. At the first moment of consciousness after the quiet of sleep, the environment created by different forms of media takes over, broadcasting the latest news and traffic, reciting the names of the villains and heroes of the moment, and filling the mind with concerns, fears, hopes, and problems. Many people feel duty bound to partake in the news on television, radio, the Internet, or in print. Very few people can ignore it altogether, and some "news junkies" consume news in vast quantities. Hearing these reports, one is forced to respond, to take positions, and to assess oneself in comparison with the proffered ideals, values, and calls for action. There are calls to mind one's health and well-being, to advocate various causes, to measure one's children against expected achievements, and to assess the family in comparison with the societal ideal held up as an example. Standards of financial success are presented for personal comparison. In recent decades, calls to prepare for the financial burdens of the future have become pervasive, and the dire consequences of not doing so are frequently hammered home. Even persons of means are threatened by the idea that they are making the wrong preparations or that they might be missing an investment opportunity. Finally, images of sickness, war, poverty, and natural and human-caused disasters confront us with the needs of their unfortunate victims and remind us of the inability to relieve suffering, however much we may want to help.

Upon getting out of bed, the requirements of the day begin to flood into the consciousness. Hygiene rituals focus on appearance in comparison with others. We desire to be perceived as attractive and successful persons in a manner consistent with socially conditioned images: chiseled body, white teeth, antiseptic breath, fragrance, coiffure, makeup, and clothing. Dissatisfaction with one's appearance is a proven source of self-alienation among both men and women. At the breakfast table, even our foods send out messages on their packaging that demand value judgments and self-assessment. Is the packaged food vitamin enriched, fat- or cholesterol-free, free of preservatives, and liked by kids or moms? Almost everything a person

consumes or applies to her body announces itself from the shelf with advertising messages, often accompanied by images of human bodily perfection. Colorful type flashes messages about price, value, health, or danger.

Most of the day is punctuated with messages blaring from radio or television, messaging gadgets, or cell phones, constantly subjecting the mind to a cacophony of conflicting ideas, commands, and exhortations. Individuals are confronted throughout the day with a multitude of situations that call for ethical or moral judgments requiring immediate responses. Individual proclivities, the ability to reflect and reason, the level of awareness of the issues involved, and the individual's moral upbringing all help determine the nature of one's responses. Multiplied by the days of the year, the passing decades, and phases of life, the sum total of these demands on the conscious and unconscious mind amounts to a pervasive, externally generated regimen. Combined with the responsibilities of caring for self and family and earning a living, this form of life surely deserves to be called a "Rat Race."

By contrast, a God-centered life cultivates a spiritual consciousness and reaches beyond the world of physical experiences toward the unseen. The most important aspect of any act, according to Islamic teachings, is the intention behind it. This is called *niyya* in Arabic. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "The reward of deeds depends upon one's intention; every person will get a reward according to what he has intended."[1] Spiritual discipline entails guidance about things one should and should not do, but it is also accompanied by an invitation to engage the faculty of reason, a constructive reminder and source of recentering, regeneration and renewed purpose. A God-centered life in Islam is not an inward-looking, monastic life, but one that reminds the believer of the central purpose of this life and places the demands of the external society in perspective by comparing its demands with the limitless power and presence of God. This consciousness is a source of strength, not of weakness.

A disciplined life in Islam offers an approach to handling the rigors of life, and especially for resisting its manipulations and ordering one's priorities and responses. It is a means of supporting the comprehensive incorporation of Islamic teachings into all aspects of life, from the ordinary to the most far-reaching. Such a discipline does not preclude participation in the modern regimen as described above. In fact, Islamic teachings do not require or prefer an isolated, monastic life away from society, nor a communalistic existence within religious enclaves. Muslims can and do enjoy living in both majority Muslim countries and in countries where they live as minorities. Wherever they live, Muslims find ways to maintain a way of life that is intertwined with Islam. This is the purpose of Islamic self-discipline. Islam is flexible, so Muslims can adapt to life anywhere on the globe. This fact has led Islam to become a cosmopolitan, global religion. The popular notion that Muslims would rather live separately, in a veiled, mysterious, and impenetrable isolation, is entirely false.

The formal act of accepting Islam is simple. In the presence of two witnesses, a person simply recites the *Shahada,* the Testimony of faith. The Arabic formula of the Shahada is *La ilaha illa Allah wa Muhammadun Rasulullah* (There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God). This statement connotes the idea of a God that is as near as one's jugular vein but is also transcendent and requires no physical image. The second part of the Shahada places the Prophet Muhammad in the context of the sacred history of humanity. He is the last of a long and broad river of God's Messengers since Adam, all sent to guide and instruct human beings. Acceptance of Islam brings immediate changes in the daily life of the individual, just as the spread of Islam to a locality introduces institutions that make such changes permanent.

Five acts of worship are obligatory for every Muslim above the age of puberty who is sane and in possession of the physical or material means to carry them out. These acts of worship, called the Five Pillars of Islam, form the universal foundation of Islamic culture and civilization. The fact that these five practices are performed by all Muslims explains the unity within the diversity of Muslims around the world. Apart from the Shahada, these practices are Prayer, Charity, Fasting, and Pilgrimage. Each of these pillars of Islam has both a spiritual and a worldly significance, and each impresses itself in different ways upon the individual and the community. Each pillar also brings forth cultural expressions and institutions that are reflected in multiple dimensions of human life.

ISLAM: A PATTERN FOR DAILY LIFE

Human relationships may be imagined as a web or a matrix in three dimensions, in which individuals are located in interlocking webs that intersect with the webs of other people. These relations can be mapped within a single lifetime or onto succeeding generations. A hallmark of Islamic teachings is the way in which they allow people to view themselves and others in terms of the responsibilities and expectations appropriate to the multiple relationships in which they participate. Taken as a whole, this matrix describes a web of relations extending from God and the self to the family, the community, the world, and the universe.

The main responsibility of the Muslim is to the Creator. This relationship is described in Islamic teachings as one of gratitude and indebtedness. The Qur'an describes the central obligation of each person to believe and to worship, but the relationship is reciprocal, as the covenant of God grants mercy and everlasting life to the one who fulfills it. Giving oneself to God is described as a goodly exchange whose reward is unimaginable. The concept of homage and indebtedness to the Creator has three implications. First, such homage may be granted to no person or created being, but only to

God. This is the central idea of *tawhid,* the concept of the oneness of God in Islam. Second, this relationship means that we do not have the right to act according to whim, nor are we supposed to wrong our souls, which is how the Qur'an describes sin. We are creatures of God to whom life and physical existence has been entrusted. This means we may neither abuse nor take our own lives nor those of others with abandon. In Islam, suicide is the most heinous act after associating other deities with God.

Third, Islam requires worship, obedience, and submission to God. The purpose of worship is to renew and purify the self and the soul, and it is a path to achieving peace through submission. The teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna outline the duties and specific rites of worship. These rites are both physical and spiritual on the one hand and worldly and otherworldly on the other. The collective expression of worship joins believers together and acts as a bridge to the universal community of souls. Beyond obligatory worship, individual striving increases the capacity to draw near to God. However, worship must not be taken to excessive lengths; and other rights and duties maintain the balance between these dimensions.

Prayer and Supplication

A Muslim is obliged to awaken at dawn for the morning (*fajr*) prayer at the sound of the call to prayer, the *adhan,* which echoes from the mosques in any village, town, or city in the Muslim world. Apart from mosques, the *adhan* is called in any place where Muslims gather for prayer. It may be called by an elder such as the head of a household, by a boy of sufficient knowledge, or by a woman or a girl among other women. The times for calling the prayer may be determined by the observation of the sun and shadows or calculated with sophisticated mathematical and astronomical instruments. Today, prayer charts based on astronomical calculations are published for urban locations, and personal electronic devices are programmed to broadcast the call to prayer at the proper times anywhere in the world.

Upon waking in the morning, it is considered good to pronounce a short invocation, such as "Praise be to God who gives us life after He has caused us to die, and unto Him is the return," which is one of many prayers and supplications taught by the Prophet Muhammad.[2] After rising, a Muslim performs the ritual washing or ablution (*wudu'*) that is required before each prayer. This washing must be performed with a pure source of water. If pure water cannot be found, it is permissible to strike the hands on pure earth, sand, or dust, shake them off, and then symbolically cleanse the hands and face. According to a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, "When a servant of Allah washes his face for ablution, every sin he contemplated with his eyes will be washed away from his face along with the water, or with the last drop of water. When he washes his hands, every sin they have wrought will be

effaced from his hands with the water, or with the last drop of water. When he washes his feet, every sin towards which his feet have walked will be washed away with the water, or with the last drop of water, with the result that he emerges pure from all sins."[3]

When a person proceeds to the place of prayer in the home or at the mosque, she may find that others may already have begun to perform the voluntary units of prayer. Then everyone performs the morning or *Fajr* prayer, followed by supplications. After the prayer, in the quiet of the morning, many Muslims read the Qur'an until sunrise. The habit of rising for the prayer at dawn encourages Muslims to begin their day's activities early and many find this quiet time very productive.

Prayer in Islam is a simple act that engages body and mind and consists of a cycle of movement and recitation called a *rak'a*. It is performed identically by men, women, and children. The recitation of the prayer is in Arabic, so that the Qur'anic passages are repeated in the language in which they were revealed. The desire of Muslims to learn Arabic stems from this obligation to pray in Arabic, but it also extends to the desire to acquire access to the original language of Islamic learning.

The Muslim Call to Prayer

1. *Allahu akbar* Allah is Great (said four times).
2. *Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allah* I bear witness that there is no god but God (said two times).
3. *Ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasul Allah* I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (said two times).
4. *Hayya 'ala-s-Sala* Hurry to prayer (said two times).
5. *Hayya 'ala-l-Falah* Hurry to success (said two times).
6. *Allahu akbar* Allah is Great (said two times).
7. *La ilaha illa Allah* There is no god but God.

For the morning *(fajr)* prayer, the following phrase is inserted after Part 5 above: *As-salatu khayrun min an-nawm* Prayer is better than sleep (said two times).

Standing, the Muslim begins the prayer with a recitation similar to the call to prayer, and then recites the opening chapter of the Qur'an, *al-Fatiha,* followed by at least three other verses of the Qur'an. Bowing from the waist, in an act called *ruku',* the Muslim recites praises to God, and then stands again, kneels with forehead, hands, knees, and toes touching the ground, in a posture called *sajda* or *sujud.* This term is often mistranslated as "prostration," which literally means lying face down rather than kneeling. The Arabic word for mosque, *masjid,* is related to *sujud* and means "place of performing *sujud.*"

The Muslim Ablution (*wudu'*)

1. Form the intent of performing ablution for the purpose of worship and purification by saying *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* In the Name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful (said one time).
2. Wash the hands up to the wrists, three times.
3. Rinse out the mouth with water, three times.
4. Clean the nostrils by sniffing up a small amount of water and then blowing it out away from the basin of clean water, three times.
5. Wash the face three times with both hands, from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin and from ear to ear.
6. Wash the right arm three times up to the far end of the elbow, and then repeat with the left arm.
7. Wipe the head once with the wet right hand.
8. Wipe the inner sides of the ears one time with the forefingers and the outer sides one time with the thumbs.
9. Wash the feet up to the ankles three times, beginning with the right foot.

The rhythm of the daily life of Muslims is set by the five obligatory prayers, which measure out the times of day and night in universally understood increments. Appointments between Muslims are often set according to the times of the daily prayers. In Muslim countries, businesses close down briefly at these times. The times for prayer were generally stated in the Qur'an and were fixed more exactly by the Prophet Muhammad, which he related as the direct teaching of the Angel Gabriel. Although it is best to perform the prayers at their appointed times, a certain amount of flexibility is allowed to account for the needs of daily life. The dawn (*fajr*) prayer is performed at the first light of dawn up to the beginning of sunrise. The noon (*zuhr*) prayer is called just after noon but can be performed up to mid-afternoon. At that time, the afternoon (*asr*) prayer is called. It may be performed up to the beginning of sunset, although Muslims are instructed not to delay it. The sunset (*maghrib*) prayer takes place immediately after sunset. Finally, the evening (*isha'*) prayer, the last obligatory prayer of the day, is called between the end of twilight and the passing of the first third of the night. In general, it may be performed any time before midnight. In addition to the obligatory prayers, voluntary prayers may also be performed as established by Prophet Muhammad. Among these are prayers during the small hours of the night. Muhammad taught his followers to pray at night but cautioned them not to be excessive in worship, to the neglect of obligations toward family and community.

ISLAM AND THE FULFILLMENT OF BASIC NEEDS

Islamic principles and guidelines cover the way in which Muslims fulfill basic requirements of clothing, food, and shelter. These involve duties and obligations for the individual person and other family members, who cooperate to meet basic needs in a reciprocal relationship. God has measured out provision for His creatures in the form of material things, which are acquired through labor and economic exchanges. Islamic legal rulings that cover permissible and impermissible acts for Muslims often involve guidance on the consumption or avoidance of material goods. The acceptance of what is *halal,* or permitted, and the avoidance of what is *haram,* forbidden or discouraged, sets the tone for a healthy and sound way of life. A constant part of daily life is seeking God's blessing in the provision of material things, through acknowledgment that each person has power only through the power of God and through submission to what God reveals about the best manner of fulfilling the needs of daily life.

Hygiene and Clothing

Out of the duty toward God that derives from the gift of life comes the duty to care for the physical body and the mind. The rights given by God in Islam begin with dignity, which pertains to life, and reason, which pertains to the mind. The integrity of the relationship between God and the human being—the broader concept of religion (*din*) in Islam—is also inviolate. Cleanliness supports purity of body and mind, and the daily rituals of washing, bathing, grooming, and dressing are performed with the intention and invocation of blessings from God.

The preservation of health grows out of the obligation to care for the body and the mind. Central to this obligation is the avoidance of excess in food and drink and the avoidance of substances that harm the body or the mind. Self-mutilation as part of religious rites or in response to grief is also forbidden. While patience in suffering is enjoined upon Muslims, putting oneself in needless danger is a violation of God's trust in the human being. Mutilating the body through scarring, tattoos, or any such cultural practices are forbidden despite their long heritage. In Islam, knowledge of God's commands and common sense in carrying them out are the final arbiters of culture. Emulating the example of the Prophet in personal cleanliness includes frequent bathing, caring for the hair, and making one's appearance clean and pleasant. Other matters of personal hygiene recommended by prophetic example are keeping the nails and hair trimmed. Weekly baths before Friday prayers, bathing after sexual relations and menstrual periods, and washing the private parts with water after using the toilet are universally recognized Islamic requirements for personal hygiene. The Prophet Muhammad

frequently cleaned his teeth, using the fibrous twig of the Acacia tree that was peeled or chewed to make a brushlike ending. These natural toothbrushes, called *miswak* or *siwak,* are still widely used by Muslims. According to a hadith, Allah's Messenger said, "If I had not found it hard for my followers or the people, I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with *siwak* before every prayer."[4]

The Prophet Muhammad's example extended to the etiquette of personal care for hygienic, aesthetic, and spiritual reasons. For example, using the right hand for eating, drinking, putting on clothing, and receiving and giving gifts was enjoined for both hygienic and spiritual reasons. For example, dressing and washing begin with the right side of the body; stepping into a mosque is done with the right foot out of respect for the sacredness of the place; however, stepping out of a mosque and into a bathroom is done with the left foot because with such actions one enters into a space that is profane. A Muslim should not reveal herself to others while using the toilet, nor should she face in the direction of prayer. Special prayers and supplications for many occasions of daily life remind the Muslim to perform each act with full intent and a God-conscious frame of mind.

Islamic Principles of Dress

Dress in Islam is governed by the principle of modesty. However, the degree of modesty required varies according to the situation in which the individual finds oneself. In private, a Muslim is supposed to observe humility and modesty even when alone. Between husband and wife, there are no requirements for covering the body, nor is there any discouragement of taking pleasure in physical beauty in this intimate setting. On the contrary, each partner is enjoined to provide comfort and pleasure for the other, as a gift of God and as a reinforcement of the marital bond. In the home, Muslims are required to dress modestly but casually in the presence of extended family members such as parents or in-laws, and around those whom one may not marry, including children. Siblings, whether of the same or different gender, cover themselves out of modesty and respect for one another's sensibilities as well.

Men must cover themselves between the waist and the knee in all circumstances except with their wives. The Prophet Muhammad's example of dress was to be covered in a dignified manner when not performing strenuous labor, and this example has been followed by Muslim men throughout history. The idea of flaunting one's physique through provocative clothing is as foreign to the Islamic tradition for men as it is for women. Over time, a style of public dress for men that emphasizes both modesty and dignity developed, in which a loose shirt and pants are worn at a minimum, often with an overgarment such as a cloak or coat. Head coverings also became

standard for public attire. The dignified image of the mature male who wears a long garment or shirt and trousers, covered by a tailored robe, cloak, or coat, and often topped by a long scarf or shawl, is one that resonates across cultures in graduation ceremonies, doctor's attire, clerical vestments, and judicial robes. Such an image is not specific to Islam, but rather reflects universally the dignity of the spiritual and intellectual powers of the human being.

When a woman who has reached puberty appears in public, the body is to be covered to a greater degree than in any other situation where she appears. A Muslim woman is required to protect her modesty in the presence of persons outside the family whom she is eligible to marry, by covering all of the body except the face and hands. Women's garments are supposed to conceal the figure by being opaque, and by a form that is loose and does not accentuate the figure. In the modern period, a style of dress involving multiple layers of clothing has become typical of Muslim women's dress.

To understand the principle of Islamic dress, whether for men or women, it is useful to consider the Western business suit. The appearance and function of this costume closely corresponds to the concept of public dress for women and men in Islam. The business suit confers modesty by conforming almost exactly to the requirements for Muslim women's public appearance: it covers all but the head and the hands, and does so in a way that is sober, often with dark, uniform color, and a shape that conceals more than it reveals. It speaks of uniformity and conformity far more than does modern Muslim clothing, with its variety of shapes, colors, and styles. The modern business suit, like Muslim clothing, is intended to level the differences among people, dignify the wearer, and place one in a professional, purposeful light before strangers. Interestingly, images of summit meetings of world leaders or business leaders reveal that the cultural norm of the business suit does not include the female attendees at such events. Among the dark-suited men who look as uniform as penguins, the occasional woman stands out by wearing a short-skirted suit in a bright color, her hair carefully coiffed. The best way to think of the difference between Muslim and Western norms of dress is as follows: In Western culture, the norm of understated dress that completely covers the body is applied to the male, whereas in Islam, it is applied to the female. In nature, does it matter which gender of bird has the plumage, and which has the neutral feathers?

The foregoing discussion does not include more extreme forms of cover that are traditionally worn in some Muslim regions and among certain classes of women. Some women prefer to cover their faces with the veil (*niqab*) because they want to emulate the Prophet Muhammad's wives, or because they have chosen to conceal themselves from men's gazes in public. Costumes like the *burqa* or the *chador,* or elaborate face veils simply carry the concept of modesty further than basic coverage. They are more limiting

to free movement and access to significant activities and technologies of modern life, such as riding escalators, driving automobiles, and boarding public transportation. Women themselves perpetuate these types of dress through everyday decisions to wear them, although there have been extreme cases of civil enforcement by reactionary regimes. Less restrictive forms of Muslim women's dress have developed out of the choices exercised by Muslim women who work, study, and insist on the right to live active lives. In many Muslim countries and increasingly on the Internet, lines of fashion are sold to meet these needs and tastes. In Western countries, selective shopping allows Muslim women to clothe themselves according to Islamic traditions of modesty by purchasing pieces off the racks of mainstream department stores.

A gathering of Muslim women reveals the entire range of practice in dress. Some wear the *niqab* face veil, gloves, and capacious, multilayered, neutral-colored gowns, revealing nothing of their physical appearance in public. Others wear long skirts, light coats, jackets, long shirts or pants, and scarves. Some wear most or all of the former, but choose not to cover their heads, or choose to dress in a way that does not distinguish them as Muslim women in a crowd. On the far end of the spectrum from the *niqab* is the Muslim woman who embraces Western fashion and chooses to wear as revealing a costume—or nearly so—as current fashion and her taste dictate. The way a Muslim woman dresses is her personal choice.

The cultural politics of Muslim women's head covering (today called *hijab*) offers a remarkable case study in cultural and gender politics. While some governments of Muslim countries force women to wear the head covering by law, others forbid it in certain contexts. Both male and female Muslims often base their judgments about a woman's piety or morality upon the presence or the absence of the head covering. Some Muslim women view rejection of the head covering as a laudable decision and as an expression of personal freedom. Many academic commentators on Islam have explained the head covering as a political and even anti-Western or antimodern statement, rather than as a personal, religious statement. For this reason, lawmakers in France have banned the wearing of head coverings in government schools. One might imagine that the widespread Western concern for human rights would discount such arbitrary attributions of motive as a basis for state policy, but apparently such a threshold of religious tolerance is too high to allow for expressions of personal piety in French schools. Thus, we have the farcical spectacle of non-Muslim Western parliamentarians arguing in their august bodies about the Qur'anic foundations of Islamic law on the subject of women's dress. At the very least, the controversy over this simple practice of piety should arouse the suspicion of critical observers. The contested ground involves power politics on both sides: on the one side, self-appointed arbiters of Westernization insist that women should show their hair, while on the other side, self-appointed arbiters of Muslim *female*

modesty insist that women should conceal it. In both cases, the bodies of Muslim women are used by others—usually men—as an ideological battleground.

The Qur'anic verses most commonly cited as the basis for the practice of modesty by both genders—and specifically for the women's practice of covering their heads in public—is the following:

> Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! God is Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils (*khumurihinna*) over their bosoms (*juyubihinna*), and not to reveal their adornment.... Turn unto God together, O believers, in order that you may succeed.
>
> (Qur'an 24:30–31)

The literal meaning of the term *khumurihinna* (singular *khimar*) is "their coverings," but it is translated here as "their veils," which refers to a specific type of covering for the face. In other words, it is an acquired cultural and regional meaning associated with an article of clothing. The object of the covering required in the verse is *juyubihinna,* literally, "their bosoms or breasts." Nowhere in the verse is the term "their faces" (the Arabic would be *wujuhihinna*) used, although the Prophet Muhammad's wives are said to have concealed their faces in public. At a minimum, scholars have interpreted this verse as commanding that women should not go bare-breasted in public, a practice that was followed in some ancient cultures. At a maximum, this verse has been used as evidence that women must conceal their faces from public view.

Without engaging in too much interpretation, one can discuss this matter at the level of fabrics and practical considerations. It is possible to draw a fabric used for covering the head over the face in order to cover the chest, or a strip of fabric can be wrapped around the head, neck, chest, and shoulders, leaving the face or even the head free. Practically speaking, one would not achieve the objective of covering both the chest and the face unless the fabrics were both dark and sheer, a requirement that in the sixth century CE could only have meant fine silk or linen fabric, an expensive luxury. A heavy fabric over the face would render the wearer blind, and a sheer fabric might be too transparent to exclude the view from without. Precedent in the time of the Prophet Muhammad seems to indicate some latitude for choice in the matter of covering the face. Centuries of regional and historical custom in Islamic dress have resulted in a staggering array of sheer, opaque, perforated, masked, wrapped, tied, pinned, layered, sculpted, draped, embellished, and unembellished fabrics to carry out the intended meaning of this verse. Both Western academics and some Islamic activists have tended to overlook this diversity of practice by referring uniformly to "veiling" or "the veil." Such

scholars and political leaders have helped to make the veil a metaphor for Muslim women—and for Islam itself—by objectifying Muslim women in the process.

A particularly interesting twist in this contemporary dispute can be traced to another Qur'anic verse upon which the practice of wearing a modest, enveloping public dress is based:

> O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks around them [when they go out of the house]. That will be better, that so they may be recognized and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.
>
> (Qur'an 33:59)

No doubt, opaque clothing that visually masks the body sends a different message than clothing that reveals and enhances its form. Thus, the mere functionality of women's Islamic dress goes beyond the issue of conformity to cultural norms. Conformity to local cultural norms does, however, determine whether the person wearing such clothing is recognized as a Muslim: depending on the circumstances, it may make a woman more or less vulnerable to being bothered, annoyed, or even singled out for persecution. Muslim women in distinctively Islamic dress are instantly identifiable to others. A woman who wraps on a scarf a certain way in a non-Muslim country instantly becomes a minority representative who may well be tasked with explaining a host of doctrinal and cultural matters related to Islam. She had better be prepared to do so. The same is true of the woman who wears "Islamic" dress in a Muslim country where fashion is a matter of cultural politics. Depending on whether the woman is in Cairo, Egypt, or Cairo, Illinois, the role she is required to play may vary, but it will be predictable just the same.

A Muslim man, by contrast, can wear clothing that completely camouflages and neutralizes his religious identity. A Muslim man can escape both the recognition and the consequences that may result from revealing his identity in public. The practice of wearing the *hijab,* therefore, puts the Muslim woman directly on the front lines of the wars of cultural identity and in the forefront of Muslim evangelism (*da'wa*), whether she wants to be there or not. In countries such as Turkey, France, Germany, or Tunisia, wearing Islamic head covering in the wrong context may have legal or civil consequences of a serious nature. In Saudi Arabia, the lack of a head covering may have legal consequences, and in Western countries, it may result in lot of conversations in the supermarket checkout line or in the need to develop a flameproof exterior against public stares. A minority of Muslim men living in Western countries eschew local cultural norms in favor of traditional Muslim dress, such as ankle-length shirts and overgarments, and caps or turbans on their heads. Such men share the public experiences of their

Muslim sisters. In short, the controversy surrounding Muslim dress often creates postmodern situations that turn tradition and status quo thinking on its head. Without forcing any specific conclusions, there are certainly many lessons to be gleaned within the range of possible discourses on the topic.

Permissible Foods

When Muslims eat, they start with a blessing of *Bismillah* (an abbreviated form of "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful"), and an additional prayer of blessing. When taking food, Muslims also pronounce one of several possible invocations, such as: "Oh God, bless us in that which You have provided for us, and shield us from the fire." When the meal is complete, Muslims close with, "Praise be to God, who fed us and gave us drink, and made us Muslims."

The concepts of *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (forbidden) foods provide common guidelines for a diversity of diets and cuisines among Muslims. A verse of the Qur'an outlines the few prohibitions that Muslims have to observe: "[God] has only forbidden you carrion and blood and the flesh of swine and anything over which a name other than that of Allah has been invoked. But if one is forced [to eat forbidden foods] by necessity and without willful disobedience nor transgressing due limits, then Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful" (Qur'an 16:115). This verse forbids four categories of meats—the flesh of an animal that has died naturally, food made with blood, pork, and the flesh of an animal that has been consecrated to a god other than Allah—with the important exception that these may be eaten by Muslims in case of desperate hunger. The Qur'an also mentions the rites that must be observed to make consumption of animals permissible. "To every people did We appoint rites that they might celebrate the name of God over the sustenance He gave them from animals; but your god is one God: submit then your wills to Him and give the good news to those who humble themselves" (Qur'an 22:34). The ritual sacrifices that mark Islamic celebrations such as *'Id al-Fitr* (the Feast of Fast-breaking after Ramadan) and *'Id al-Adha* (the Feast of Sacrifice that marks the end of the Hajj pilgrimage) are very similar to the regular slaughtering for food, except in their special intent and the type of animal required for these special occasions. Sacrifice in Islam always involves distribution of the meat among family, friends, and the needy. As the Qur'an says, "It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him" (Qur'an 22:37).

The rites for slaughtering an animal for food require the person performing the act to pronounce the name of God in the formula, *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, Allahu akbar* (In the name of God, the Beneficent

and the Merciful, God is Great!). The killing must be done quickly with a long, extremely sharp knife, slitting the jugular vein, the carotid artery, the windpipe, and the esophagus but not decapitating the animal. This rule is very similar to that followed by Kosher butchers in Judaism. Because animals slaughtered in the typical industrial method are often stunned with an electric bolt to the head, for some Muslims this would mean that such animals had died before slaughter, thus rendering them forbidden. Debates have been conducted about the relative humaneness of killing by the industrial method versus the traditional Kosher or Halal methods of slitting the throat with a very sharp knife. Islamic law requires humane treatment up to the moment of death. The animal is not to be harshly restrained, nor hoisted up by chains, nor is the animal to see the knife. Skillful slaughter brings about a quick and relatively painless death. According to studies of the correctly performed Halal method of slaughter, the animal registers little pain and dies quickly, but the heart continues to pump blood out of the body, which purifies the meat from potential disease.[5] Muslims are not allowed to eat blood in any form, except for what remains in the meat after draining. The list of animals that Muslims may eat includes all domestic birds, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, all types of deer, and rabbits. Fish and seafood such as mollusks need not be ritually slaughtered. The kinds of animals that are forbidden to Muslims include any animal that has already been killed or strangled, the pig and all of its food by-products (including rendered bones and cartilage that produce gelatin), carnivorous animals and birds of prey, rodents, reptiles, all insects except locusts, and mules or donkeys.[6] All other foods are permissible, unless a forbidden substance has been processed with it, or if it has been fermented to produce alcoholic content.

Muslims are encouraged in the Qur'an to "Eat of the things that Allah has provided for you, lawful and good: but fear Allah in whom you believe" (Qur'an 2:172). The word that is used in this verse for good and lawful foods is *tayyibat,* "beneficial provisions." Many permissible and beneficial foods are mentioned in the Qur'an, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, grains, milk, honey, and Halal meats as described above. With today's industrially prepared foods, eating what is lawful requires effort, education, and research to avoid questionable products. Food additives such as gelatin, vitamins derived from animal products, and animal fats used in processing make many food items questionable, along with the fact that industrial processing, packaging, and transport may introduce forbidden substances into otherwise permissible foods. The recent emphasis on avoiding cholesterol has been a boon for Muslims in the United States because products that once contained lard now proudly proclaim only vegetable fats. New labeling laws also help Muslims select permissible foods. Preparing young Muslim children for visits to the candy store or the cereal aisle gives many youngsters their first lesson in internalizing Islamic values.

Muslims are specifically permitted to eat meat slaughtered by Jews and Christians. This provision fosters social mingling because it makes it easier for Muslims to intimately socialize with the People of the Book. However, Muslims may not eat meat over which an invocation to any deity other than Allah has been made. This rule prevents some South Asian Muslims from eating at vegetarian restaurants owned by Hindus. It does not apply to Christians and Jews, however, since God in these religions is the same as the God of Islam. A religion that requires dietary isolation among people who worship the same God would prevent sharing among neighbors and visits among all sorts of associates. This would create great difficulties for people who convert to Islam, since the Islamic requirement to keep good relations with their birth families would conflict with their inability to eat with them. Among religiously heterogeneous neighbors in Muslim regions, the sharing of food among neighbors of different faiths is common, and it is frequently mentioned in literature. Not all Muslims in Western societies take full advantage of this permission, however, or seem to understand it fully.

The well-known Islamic prohibition against wine extends to all fermented alcoholic beverages that might be made from dates or grains (such as beer and distilled spirits). Addressing the Prophet Muhammad and the questions raised by his followers, the Qur'an states, "They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: 'In them is great sin and some profit for men; but the sin is greater than the profit.' They ask you how much they are to spend. Say: 'What is beyond your needs.' Thus does Allah make clear to you His Signs in order that ye may consider" (Qur'an 2:219). Another verse states, "Satan seeks only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance and to turn you from the remembrance of Allah and from worship. Will you then not abstain?" (Qur'an 5:91) Both verses justify the prohibition against drinking and gambling by describing the harm involved in them, even while acknowledging that they contain a certain benefit. Muslim scholars have interpreted the prohibition against wine as extending to any intoxicating substance, including drugs that cloud the mind and inhibit self-control.

The question of tobacco and smoking is more complex. No matter how widespread the addiction to tobacco and smoking may be among Muslims, few claim that it is beneficial, and multiple arguments exist for its prohibition or avoidance. It is costly and falls into the category of wasting money, since it has no nutritional or medicinal benefit. Its health risks are certain, with the risk of lung cancer, heart attack, and emphysema among smokers, including the known risk of secondhand smoke that endangers others. In general, Muslims have a responsibility to care for their own health, making it forbidden to harm the body in any way. This forms a strong argument against tobacco, in addition to the loss of self-control that accompanies any addiction.

Fasting

During the ninth lunar month of Ramadan, all adult Muslims of sound mind and body are obliged to fast for a period of 29 or 30 days. During Ramadan, the day begins with a predawn meal known as *suhur*. This might consist of a few dates and some water or it might even be a complete meal. After performing the dawn prayer, many Muslims conduct their day as usual; however, for some, daily life shifts toward the evening during Ramadan. The *iftar* meal that breaks the fast at sunset might be simple or elaborate, the former being the Prophetic example, whereas the latter is a widespread cultural practice.

The Qur'an describes fasting as an act of worship, a physical and spiritual self-discipline that was enjoined on all Prophets and pious people from time immemorial. To fast means to abstain from food and drink, sexual contact, conflict, arguments, and unkind language or acts. A traveler may break the fast and make up days later, as do menstruating women. People who are ill or whose condition would make fasting a health risk, including women who are pregnant or nursing, may compensate by preparing food for others or donating money (obligatory on Muslims who cannot fast). Children often participate in the fast but are not required to fast until reaching puberty. The Prophet Muhammad taught that while he himself fasted for long periods outside of Ramadan, other Muslims should not fast more than every other day during other months of the year. The Prophet preferred Mondays and Thursdays for voluntary fasting, and forbade fasting on Friday, the day of the communal *Jumu'a* prayer.

Ramadan is a time of increased fellowship among family members, neighbors, and friends, who share meals on many nights, attend prayer services in the evening, and increase charitable giving. Hosts compete for the merit of giving the *iftar* meal to their guests. At sunset, the Prophet Muhammad's example was to break the fast by eating a few dates and water. The sunset (*maghrib*) prayer follows the breaking of the fast, and a substantial meal is served afterward. The streets of Muslim cities come to life after *iftar*, as people visit each other in homes and mosques. Increased concentration on worship accompanies the physical rigor of fasting. Over the course of the month of Ramadan, the entire Qur'an is recited during lengthy prayers called *Tarawih*.

DAILY ACTIVITIES AT HOME AND IN PUBLIC

Every Muslim is responsible for how she spends her time. The Qur'an describes time as both a gift and a test but also as a mystery. The Prophet Muhammad related that God said, "The sons of Adam inveigh against Time, but I am Time. In My hand are the night and the day."[7] How each

person puts her time on earth to use is part of the test of life. Time is for fulfilling basic needs but not to excess. Time for worship should be observed precisely, but one who worships excessively and neglects other responsibilities has misspent her time. The amount of resolve required to maintain a purposeful life in Islam is supported and eased by the concept of intention. Intention provides the criteria for short- and long-term decisions about allocating time. Islamic teachings encourage believers to avoid idleness and to not be deceived by the trappings of this life. Islamic teachings also encourage the believers to shun extreme asceticism and practice moderation in all things. Every Muslim is supposed to support her basic needs, carry out the duties owed to God, and care for those to whom she is responsible. Time is well spent in the pursuit of justice, according to individual talents. Prioritizing one's time helps a person escape the noise of things clamoring for attention and helps one make conscious choices not to give in to illegitimate demands, such as imitating what "everyone" is doing. Islam, like Christianity, demands a "purpose-driven life."

A Prayer for Daily Life

Muslims invoke blessings and greetings upon one another during the day and acknowledge God in framing each intention to do something, whether upon taking care of bodily functions, preparing for prayer, or asking for guidance. The purpose of these supplications is to purify the intention to act, to establish an appropriate frame of mind, and to attain God-consciousness.

The Prophet Muhammad taught many supplications (singular, *du'a*) during his lifetime, and his followers transmitted them to succeeding generations. These prayers may be compared to a set of keys, each designed to unlock a certain door. A good example of such a prayer is a supplication that is often made before deciding on a matter, a prayer that is called *istikhara*. The *istikhara* prayer is made after one of the formal daily prayers. After making her prayer, the worshipper performs two additional cycles of prayer (*raka'at*) and says: "Oh, Allah, I seek your favor through your knowledge and seek ability from you through your power and beg you for your infinite bounty. For you have power and I have none, you have knowledge but I know not, and you are the Knower of the Unseen. Oh Allah, if you know that this matter is good for me in my religion, for my livelihood, and for the consequences of my affairs, then ordain it for me. But if you know that this matter is evil for me in my religion, for my livelihood, and for the consequences of my affairs, then turn it away from me and turn me away from it, and choose what is good for me wherever it may be and make me pleased with it." After making this prayer, the worshipper states the difficulty or the need that she wants to be fulfilled.[8]

The words of this prayer first acknowledge the limitations of human knowledge and one's ability to influence the future, and then acknowledge the all-knowing and all-powerful nature of God. Second, the individual restates the criteria for any sound decision: in other words, that the matter be beneficial to preserving faith and life and that the matter may enhance the person's future situation. This part of the supplication gives a person a certain mental distance on the matter, so that she may avoid becoming obsessed with a desire or a course of action. Finally, the supplicant prays for God's guidance and submits to it in spirit. It might be sufficient if one was to simply consign any decision to fate, but this supplication goes further. It recognizes the need not only to resign oneself to possible rejection but also to be at peace with God's decision, and not to resent it. Thus, the supplicant asks God to "turn it away from me and turn me away from it. . .choose what is good for me, and make me pleased with it." It is often as important psychologically to be able to move on with life after a difficult decision as it may have been to make the decision itself. Many Muslims have expressed gratitude for the wisdom contained in this supplication, which has stood them in good stead throughout life. It provides a good example of the supplications that the Prophet Muhammad taught as part of his message to the believers.

Life at Home

In the matrix of human relations, family members form the first threads of the web surrounding the individual, and families are the nodes that, when joined together, make up the community. Islam raised human relations above the level of clan, tribe, ethnicity, and race, giving priority to piety and belief. Family relations, both of blood and of marriage, remain each person's responsibility.

Responsibility toward parents is most often mentioned in Islamic teachings. To honor parents—especially the mother—is a lasting duty that the Qur'an cites as a bedrock principle. Muslims are to speak kindly and respectfully to parents and care for them in need or old age. Obedience to parents ends when it conflicts with belief in God and the duties it entails, but beyond these specific instances, Muslims are enjoined to keep good relations with parents, whether they are Muslim or not.

Kin are an extension of the parents, who share the same lineage, and deserve kindness and aid before others. Responsibility toward siblings is defined by the shared womb and is second in importance only to responsibility toward one's parents in importance. Blood relatives claim priority over unrelated persons, according to the degree of closeness. This aspect of human relations provides a set of expectations and responsibilities toward immediate and extended families that includes every individual. Orphans are

mentioned in the Qur'an as persons particularly deserving of care by both individuals and the community. This emphasizes the importance of the family bond as a functional network that includes everyone in a welfare safety net and that is explicitly extended to those unfortunate persons without kin. Islam does not recognize an adoption process that obliterates family identity or conceals true genealogy, but it does extend the benefits of adoption in terms of material and spiritual well-being, including welcoming such individuals into the household.

Marital Relations

Islamic marriage is the conclusion of an agreement between the man and the woman. Family members play an important supporting role in the selection of spouses, particularly because premarital relations among prospective mates are very limited in traditional Muslim societies. The legitimacy of the marriage contract requires the full, though sometimes silent, consent of the bride and gives the couple the right to cohabit and produce legitimate offspring. The groom provides a bride-gift, which is the property of the bride for her to save, spend, or invest as she chooses. Rights and responsibilities concerning material and spiritual support, authority and obedience, love and compassion, enmity and reconciliation are sufficiently complex as to belie any pat, unconditional explanations. Beyond the normative statements about marriage in the Qur'an, its stories of historical men and women and descriptions of events in the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime add dimension to the portrait of marital relations and gender issues.

Debates over the precise meanings of terms in the Qur'an have been used to support a view of the husband as the dominant or instrumental marriage partner, by virtue of his financial support or inherent qualities, or his ability to wield the final word or any other instrument over his wife. Scholars disagree about these points, however, and debates swirl endlessly on the subject. In the Qur'an, husbands and wives are both described as sources of compassion and mercy, as garments to one another, and as two beings of like nature. The Qur'an also warns that spouses may become enemies of each other's ultimate success, or helpers in attaining it. When married couples contemplate separation, the Qur'an demands that they seek an amicable decision to either continue the marriage or terminate the bond. Tyranny in marriage is destructive; thus, the rights of the husband bring forth similar rights for the woman, rights being reciprocal responsibilities. When discussing the roles of men and women in Islam, it is not enough to focus upon one verse or the other as the definitive position of the Qur'an. Instead, the verses of the Qur'an must be taken as a whole and within the overall context of individual relations with God, with the self, in the family, and in marriage.

With regard to the woman's social position in terms of work and her responsibilities to care for the home and children, the Qur'an prescribes no set role. Spouses can agree on obtaining help in nursing babies where both agree. Legal rulings by Muslim scholars do not lay down a quid pro quo in which a man's responsibility to provide food, shelter, and clothing for his wife is exchanged for the wife's responsibility to clean house, cook, and raise the children. The Qur'an grants women the right to their earnings, which implies the right to carry out economic activities that would result in such earnings. Similarly, any wealth the wife possesses may be contributed to the household or held for herself or her children. As the Qur'an says, "And in no wise covet those things in which Allah has bestowed his gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn: but ask Allah of His bounty: for Allah has full knowledge of all things" (Qur'an 4:32).

In our times, it is important to set aside the modern notion of the nuclear family and the related concept of wage labor in order to more broadly view men's and women's roles in supporting the family and participating in society outside of the home. The idea that a woman's place is in a two-bedroom apartment or suburban detached single-family dwelling, without access to extended family, other adults, or educational opportunities for herself or her children, is not a normal situation in which to raise a family. Living in cities or as minorities in non-Muslim countries, Muslim families raising children by themselves need to create their own community structures and surrogate extended families. Women's work is needed in these nascent communities to help build institutions, educate children and other family members, provide services and friendships for youth, and build other family support services. This work of institution building and defending the community against internal or external stresses is not the province of men only, but of both partners. Whether as volunteers or as paid workers, women's participation in these community-building activities is a form of work outside the home, but it can also be viewed as a direct extension of child raising and household support. Unfortunately, uncritical views of the nuclear family as the norm in modern society have left women and children—and for that matter men as well—more isolated than a broader rethinking of the definitions of family, work, home, and child rearing in an Islamic context might yield.

Public Life

Stepping outside the home, a Muslim enters into the realm of public life. Islam does not require or encourage seclusion but invites individuals to use their talents to seek the common good and social justice. This is a central idea of the term *jihad,* which does not necessarily have anything to do with

warfare or violence, nor is it limited to the personal struggle to overcome temptation or sin.[9] The idea behind jihad, which includes all types of struggle for justice, is expressed in the following verse of the Qur'an: "The believers, both men and women, are protectors one of another. They enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil. They observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy, for Allah is Exalted in Power and Wise" (Qur'an 9:71).

Entering the public sphere is always a challenge, but it is a challenge that the Prophet Muhammad felt was preferable to monasticism or withdrawal, out of either an excess of bitterness or fear of corruption. When Muslims begin work or travel, they often make a brief supplication that acknowledges the role of the Creator in every action and seek God's protection and guidance in whatever they do.[10] A common supplication for leaving the house is pronounced silently or aloud: "In the name of Allah, I believe in Allah, I rely on Allah. That which Allah wills takes place. There is neither power nor strength but in Allah."[11]

The Public Responsibilities of a Muslim

The place of the individual in the matrix of self, family, and marriage is lived out within the larger framework of the community, which includes those persons with whom every individual comes into contact in the course of daily or periodic occupations. The principles that govern individual and collective responsibilities in these relationships comprise the standards of Islamic ethics. Living a moral life requires the individual to understand and prioritize the demands of any given situation to find the most satisfactory response, to enjoin what is good, and to avoid harm.

Guests deserve utmost generosity and are required to be gracious and unobtrusive in return. Neighbors are to be treated with kindness and respect, and the Muslim is required to foster friendly relations and care if one's neighbors are in need. There is no room for thoughtlessness or the insistence that individual responsibilities end at the property line. Keeping the home and the streets clean of filth is required of Muslims. Removing a dangerous object or obstacle from the road is considered an act of charity, as is a kind word or a smile. Common byways, resources such as air and water, and even visual space involve rights of the neighbor that should not be violated. The concept of the neighbor may be readily extended to any person with whom one comes into temporary proximity, such as on public transportation or in a queue, sharing workspace, or similar situations. Within such a concept, the idea of annoying a stranger or an acquaintance, much less of ignoring a person in an emergency or in obvious hardship, would be unethical in Islam.

Economic Relations

Economic relations with others, regardless of whether the others are seen or unseen, fall into the category of public behavior. Islamic teachings give scrupulous attention to fair and honest dealings concerning economic transactions. Islamic legal traditions elaborate detailed guidelines for buying and selling; for entering into, recording, and fulfilling contracts; and for relations between the employer and the employee. A common example of this concern is the tradition that a person who is hired to do work must be paid before his sweat has dried. In return for this consideration, labor and production are to be performed with integrity and excellence. Economic exploitation based on neglect, deception, or greater financial might is prohibited, including individual or institutional attempts to use financial strength to reduce people to indebtedness. Both debtors and lenders are warned against placing themselves or one another into disadvantageous and spiritually impoverishing relationships because of money.

The central concept of property in Islam is that everything is given to us by God as a provision for this life and that ultimately everything belongs to God. Private property must be honored, but people hold their wealth as a trust from the Creator. The desire for wealth, often associated with envy, greed, and avarice, can only be held in check by generosity. *Zakat,* the annual Alms Tax of Islam, amounts to annual obligatory giving, whereas *Sadaqa* is voluntary charity that may be given at any time, and takes many different forms. Charity may involve money, services, in-kind goods, and even a simple act of kindness or aid. Charity is not the privilege of the wealthy alone but is a responsibility for everyone.

The term *Zakat* carries the meanings of "purification" and "growth," implying that personal wealth is purified by giving and that its growth is predicated upon sharing. All adults who are sane, free, and financially able have to give a small portion of their wealth each year. This money may be disbursed by individuals, or given to a common fund in the absence of a recognized authoritative body. These funds are to support specific groups of people who are mentioned in the Qur'an: "Alms are only for the poor and the needy, those who collect [alms], those whose hearts are to be reconciled, to free captives and the debtors, for the cause of Allah, and (for) the wayfarers; this is a duty imposed by Allah. Allah is the Knower, the Wise" (Qur'an 9:60). The obligation to practice charity is firmly established in the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the consensus of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim scholars.

The condition for paying *Zakat* is the accumulation of a certain amount of money beyond basic needs. In Arabic, this condition is called *nisab.* If one does not reach the required level of wealth within a year, no *Zakat* is due. The amount of the *nisab* varies for currency, precious metals, or other forms of wealth such as natural resources, land, or livestock. The wealth must

have been held in the owner's control for a full lunar year, after which 2.5 percent of the accrued wealth is owed as *Zakat*. Any outstanding debts are deducted from the *nisab,* and any additional earnings or losses are figured as well. Each Muslim is responsible for calculating the amount of *Zakat* that she owes.

The Local Community and the Global Umma

The mosque (*masjid*) is at the center of Muslim community life. It is also a platform for Muslims' interaction with other communities and a place of spiritual renewal, learning, mutual support, and collective organization and decision making. Performing the prayer in the company of others is preferred over praying alone. Muslim men are encouraged to perform their prayers at the mosque and are obliged to attend the Friday communal prayer (*al-Salat al-Jumu'a*). Women are permitted to pray at the mosque and attend Friday prayers but are not obliged to do so. In some Muslim countries, custom discourages or excludes females from entering the mosque, but there is no clear basis for this practice in Islamic law.

The minimum requirement for a place of prayer is a clean spot on the earth or a piece of fabric sufficient for a single person to carry out the prayer movements. This is the origin of the prayer rug, which has no further sacred significance in Islam, although such rugs are an important facet of Muslim textile arts. A place of prayer may be a room oriented toward the Ka'ba in Mecca, a borrowed room in a public building, a converted building, or a large and elaborately decorated purpose-built structure. Mosques can be found in a marvelous array of architectural forms and decorations, including recent examples that combine modern and traditional features.

Men's and women's spaces for prayer are sometimes separated by physical barriers such as walls, curtains, low partitions, or special sections such as a balcony. The construction of adequate spaces for women in new mosques, especially in the West, is a contested aspect of building design. Women's spaces are often too small, too isolated to hear or participate effectively, and lacking in sufficient space for children, who most often pray alongside the women. The fact that mosque construction has not kept pace with Muslim population growth in many Western countries compounds this problem. Today, such factors often conspire to make attending the mosque for prayers an uncomfortable and sometimes spiritually unfulfilling experience for women. However, Muslim women have begun to speak out about such problems, and the planning bodies of local Muslim communities are now beginning to address issues of unequal access. Some women have stopped coming to the mosque entirely, while others work hard to improve accommodations in existing spaces and future construction, and to argue for the positions they favor concerning use of these spaces by both genders.

As a center of religious and cultural life, the mosque or local Islamic center takes on many functions. Traditionally, the mosque served as a school, as a place where the homeless or a traveler could sleep and receive charity, and as a sanctuary. In minority Muslim communities today, the mosque may include spaces where lessons in the Qur'an and other types of education are given to adults and children. Such education may include courses on the basic duties of a Muslim, Arabic language, or other topics. Lectures and even social and medical services are often provided in Islamic centers, and business affairs as well as community outreach services are conducted within its precincts. Funerals, marriages, and other contractual arrangements, as well as arbitration and counseling, might take place within a mosque or Islamic center.

Cultural, Temporal, and Generational Challenges

The Muslim community is among the most culturally, ethnically, and geographically diverse religious communities in the world. Today, Muslims live in nearly every country in the world. Thirty-six countries have a Muslim population greater than 66 percent, while an additional 10 countries have between 36 and 65 percent. Islam is increasingly a South Asian and Southeast Asian phenomenon, with half of all Muslims living east of Lahore, Pakistan. Over one-third of Muslims are minorities in non-Muslim countries, and the Muslim minority of India is the largest Muslim population in the world—roughly the same size as the largest Muslim nation of Indonesia. Several European countries now have significant Muslim populations, including Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, mainly because of postcolonial immigration and labor shortages in Europe.[12]

As Islam spread into Asia, Africa, and Europe, Muslims came to represent a dazzling array of cultures that nonetheless retained uniform doctrines and practices, which were embodied in the Five Pillars of Islam. A process of doctrinal winnowing took place, as knowledgeable converts became aware that customs contradicting Islamic law—such as infanticide, bride price, and alcohol-related rituals—were unacceptable to Muslims, although pre-Islamic customs have persisted to some extent. Beyond such prohibitions, however, cultural variations in Islamic practice were tolerated, and cultural forms such as food customs, dress, sports, artistic expressions, architecture, and commercial practices continued to shape people's lives. The spread of Islam was not a melting pot or even a mosaic, but rather, to use the metaphor of the American Muslim scholar Umar Faruq Abdullah, "a clear river flowing over a varied cultural bedrock."[13]

Historically, many cultural practices entered Muslim daily life and radiated out from the bearers of Islam to new regions. This phenomenon may be explained by the gradual spread of Islam among local populations, even in

regions that came under Muslim rule in the sixth and seventh centuries CE. Despite the stereotypical view of conversion to Islam by force, there were in general no sudden mass conversions to Islam, and many regions experienced centuries of exposure to Muslim culture before a majority of their populations accepted Islam. A second explanation for the variety of Muslim cultures relates to the tolerant attitude toward other religions and toward culture in general that is enshrined in Islamic law. ''People of the Book,'' who were mostly Jews and Christians, were accorded freedom of worship and even the right to live under their own religious laws. In practice, this condition often extended to other groups as well, although individual rulers carried out contrary and even brutal policies at times. Unlike the form of tolerance that depends upon the whim of individual rulers, the Qur'anic mandate ''Let there be no compulsion in religion'' (Qur'an 2:256) enshrined the principle of religious tolerance in Islamic law. This principle was further reinforced by the practices of the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime.

Islamic dietary and marital laws facilitated the mingling of religious groups and permitted close social and economic interaction. The practice of Islam in distant places did not require the construction of hermetically sealed enclaves. A spirit of curiosity and openness to knowledge, ideas, and the products of different cultures is attested by the vast expansion of trade and urbanization in Muslim history. This exposure to the wider world and the economic influence it fostered made developing Muslim cultures porous entities that absorbed influences from the cultures around them. The mingling of cultures in the modern era of globalization continues this trend. However, today, it unfolds in an environment of political decline among Muslims who are under the threat of an engulfing wave of cultural dominance by Western forms. As Abdullah notes in the article, ''Islam and the Cultural Imperative,'' the tolerance of earlier times has been supplanted in some Muslims by the perception that a single cultural model must be shored up by rigid imitation if Islam is to survive. For example, among immigrants and converts to Islam in the United States, this cultural ambivalence affects issues such as youth education and the participation of Muslims in civil society. The process of ''re-centering Islam''—a term used by Richard W. Bulliet in describing Muslim cultural development—is far from complete, whether among Muslims in Western countries or among Muslims in majority Muslim countries.[14]

The Pilgrimage

The Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam, a once in a lifetime journey of pilgrimage to Mecca during the Hajj season. It is not a part of daily life but is a special occasion for those who fulfill this obligation. Integral to daily life, however, is the *desire* to perform Hajj, a Muslim's consciousness of not

having fulfilled this duty, or a longing to repeat the experience. Hajj represents the constantly renewed consciousness of a larger geographic space that contains the entire Muslim community, and it is reinforced with every prayer performed facing the Ka'ba in Mecca. The existence of this universalistic pillar of the religion prevented Islam from becoming a religion of separateness. To the contrary, every Muslim renews her outward orientation through praying for and imagining the Hajj journey, and each actual journey to distant Mecca reinforces the unity and connectedness of the Umma. The Hajj reinforces universal Islamic practices; carries knowledge, ideas, and technologies far and wide; maintains communication and travel infrastructures; and maintains a vision of unity that persists to the present day. The past 50 years have seen a tremendous increase in the number of participants in the Hajj, especially in the number of women who perform Hajj.

MUSLIMS AS CITIZENS OF NATIONS AND OF THE WORLD

Relations between and among nations and their citizenry exist at a different order of magnitude than those among individuals, but they belong to a realm of collective responsibility that touches everyone. National and international relations impinge on daily life through their impact on local populations and influence awareness in a media-saturated and globalized world such as ours. As voters, taxpayers, and participants in decisions great and small, individual citizens bear the responsibility to inform themselves and to work toward justice. The expression "think globally, act locally" sheds light on the impact of such issues on daily life. Making the effort to work for justice and avoid harm to the greatest degree possible is preferable in Islam to remaining ignorant and unaware. In the words of the Qur'an, "On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns and it suffers every ill that it earns" (Qur'an 2:286).

The daily life of Muslims is shaped by a variety of factors beyond geographic or cultural diversity. The Palestinian *Intifadas*, the Afghan and Gulf Wars, and the American Muslim community's feeling of crisis and doubt following the atrocities of September 11, 2001, have all had an impact on the daily life of Muslims in the United States. Centuries earlier, the long-term effects of the Crusades, the Spanish Reconquista, and the expulsion of Muslims from Spain created watersheds in attitudes that must have been similar, although these events may not have impinged as rapidly on the consciousness of Muslims as today's media dictates. The historian Steven Runciman, writing about the Crusades while witnessing World War II in Britain, described these effects: "Even more harmful was the effect of the Holy War on the spirit of Islam.... The savage intolerance shown by the Crusaders was answered by growing intolerance amongst the Muslims."[15] Although the Crusades happened generations ago, the expectation that the

collective body of Muslims must have ''gotten over it'' by now presupposes that more constructive relations have erased such memories. What came later, however, were just as bad, if not worse. Attitudes about the cultural and racial superiority of the West have been woven deeply into global education and communications. The very term ''civilization'' was contested in its application to other cultures and races, and the study of history in the education systems of modern nation-states became a platform for promoting Western civilization as being synonymous with world civilization. Were such attitudes the possession of only a few educated elites, they would have had less of an impact. However, universal education in the West has made such attitudes more pervasive, a situation in which ignorance of Islam has flowed back and forth between mass education and mass media in an endless loop.

It is not surprising that bitterness has followed two centuries of Western colonization and domination over Muslim regions, dividing them into nations according to the desires of outside powers. Frustration has only increased among educated as well as uneducated Muslims because of the continuing disputes over countries and their resources, and by the portrayal of Muslims as ''anti-Western,'' a term assumed too often to be synonymous with reactionary political tendencies and antimodern ideas. In Europe, the atmosphere in the half-century since World War II has been marked by turbulence as colonialism declined and Muslim immigration increased. For African American Muslims in the United States, the additional insult of slavery's legacy is another factor. Muslims are affected by such developments in their view of themselves, in their choices of how to rear their children, in their choices of education and living space, and in the choices to socialize or live in relative isolation from their neighbors.

There is another side to this story, however. The past century has also seen Muslims' daily presence in the West for the first time in the history of both civilizations. Non-Muslim neighbors, schoolmates, colleagues at work, and families of individuals who have converted to Islam all are beginning to experience Muslim culture on a more intimate basis. In the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States in particular, Muslim culture is no longer as distant and exotic as it once was, as each culture samples from the other. A sense of exhilaration and optimism has resulted from this encounter on both sides, even against a backdrop of negative imagery in many sectors of the mass media. Muslims are witnessed engaging in daily prayer in the workplace and at school, observing the Ramadan fast, giving charity, and living according to Islamic precepts. To the dismay of many Muslims, their coreligionists are now seen to suffer from domestic violence and family dysfunction like people in any other community, and social service providers now serve Muslim communities along with those of the majority. Religious and secular charities, political organizations, and professional groups have witnessed Muslims' generosity and civic values. During the past decade, major

newspapers, national news magazines, and television networks have increased their coverage of local Muslim affairs, in contrast to earlier coverage of Islam as mainly a foreign policy story. The increase in positive portrayals of Muslims in print, in educational materials, and online has been countered somewhat by the efforts of groups who think it is in their interest to discourage Muslims' input in education about Islam in schools and the media and to challenge positive coverage of Islam. Despite such moves, however, public school systems in the United States have written religious accommodation policies that now allow Muslim students to perform their daily prayers, wear distinctive Islamic dress, and enjoy release time to celebrate their religious holidays.

How one lives, whether as a member of a minority or a majority, in a small Muslim community or a large one, and how one is perceived by one's neighbors profoundly affect daily life and the education of a new generation of Muslims. Acceptance by neighbors, schoolmates, and colleagues helps determine how Muslims dress, how they name their children, and whether they are comfortable living among the larger population or clustered in ethnic or religious enclaves. Muslims are entering professional careers in all occupations and making their impact on the cultures of the nations where they live.

Relations with the Natural World

At the outward reaches of the matrix of a Muslim's responsibility is the individual's relation to the earth and ultimately to the universe. To Muslims, God revealed the outlines of natural laws and the mysteries of creation. He celebrates them in revelations that have stimulated many generations of thinkers and scientists. God teaches that the natural order was provided for His creatures. Stewardship of the environment, both the natural environment and that built by humans, is a commonly invoked concept in the Abrahamic religions, and it finds expression in Islamic sources in ways that affect individual decisions and daily acts. The creation of the human being as the vicegerent of God (*khalifat Allah*) on earth implies a degree of mastery conferred upon humankind but also of awesome duty. Together with the gifts of language and knowledge, this concept frames the responsibility of the human being toward the environment. An important verse in the Qur'an describes the paradoxical nature of the human condition, which is simultaneously honored but fraught with danger: "Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it; but the human being assumed it. Lo! He has proven to be a tyrant and a fool" (Qur'an 33:72). However, this indictment of humankind does not negate the promise of humanity in Surat al-Rahman (The All-Merciful):

Al-Rahman!
He it is who taught the Qur'an.
He it is who created man.
He it is who taught him to understand.
The sun and the moon follow courses exactly planned.
The plants and the trees bow in adoration.
He raised high the firmament and set up the weighing-pan
So that you will not exceed the mean.
Establish measure with justice and cheat not in the balance,
For it is He Who spread out the earth for all creatures.

(Qur'an 55:1–10)

Another translation of verses 7–9 in the above passage captures a different nuance: "And the sky He hath uplifted; and He hath set the measure, that ye exceed not the measure, so observe the measure strictly, and do not fall short thereof." Surely such lofty language surrounding the Qur'anic verses about balance and justice cannot refer merely to the accurate weighing of vegetables in the marketplace! Clearly, the verses that follow these later on in the Sura encompass what is in the earth and beyond. "Oh company of jinn and men, if you have the power to penetrate the regions of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate (them)! You will never penetrate them save with (Our) permission!" (Qur'an 55:33). Modern environmental science has shown us that nature is balanced in highly complex and unsuspected ways and that human activity in a spirit of conquest has upset the balance of nature. The integration of economic and political spheres in modern life has moved the responsibility for the stewardship of the earth into every household. Thus, decisions about what products to use and to avoid, how to dispose of trash, and how ordinary daily actions affect the environment are within individual purview, however small the immediate impact. As a community, Muslims have lagged behind in such environmental awareness, but the tools of understanding the environment and the consequences for individual and collective responsibility are present in the sacred texts of Islam. Both high-level scholarship and popular consciousness-raising on this subject are finally underway within the Muslim community.

THE RETURN OF THE DAY

Returning home each day, a Muslim greets the inhabitants of the house and expresses thanks for her safe return. After taking food accompanied by a blessing, she performs the sunset and evening prayers. Reading the Qur'an, she contemplates God's forgiveness and seeks guidance for the day's problems and her plans for the future. When she retires for bed, she performs an invocation first made by the Prophet more than 1400 years ago: "In Your

name, Oh God, I die and I live.'' When she wakes up, she says, as did the Prophet, ''All Praise is due to God, Who makes us live after He makes us die and unto Him is the Resurrection.''[16]

Sound relations with oneself, the family, the community, the world, and the environment are described in Islamic teachings as instrumental in achieving the very purpose of life. The Qur'an describes this mutual responsibility in the following verses:

> The believers, both men and women, are protectors one of another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil. They observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy, for Allah is exalted in power and Wise.
>
> (Qur'an 9:71)

> Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity.
>
> (Qur'an 3:104)

Achievement of the overriding purpose of life outlined in these verses presupposes a level of social and gender equality, freedom of speech and thought, and access to education, whether between spouses or siblings, kin or neighbors, or community members at large. For an individual, carrying out this purpose requires that the indicator light of God-consciousness be always ''on.'' For the community, it means that collective responsibility must be borne for fulfilling this purpose. This is the true meaning of the phrase, ''Islam is a way of life,'' which some modern thinkers seem to find so mysterious and excessive. It makes mockery of a concept that has often been touted as a goal of Western governmental policies toward Muslims, namely that they should become secularized and that Islam should become a mere accessory, a bland but perhaps mildly interesting cultural identity. If the principles of Islam are linked to daily life in essential and convincing ways, then it is difficult to see how one could conceive of separating the Islamic faith from the daily life of Muslims. Such an option would leave daily life without purpose or substance in the absence of the spiritual goals that daily life in Islam is meant to support.

NOTES

1. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* Hadith 1.51, cited from *The Alim,* software.
2. See, for example, ''Morning and Evening *Du'a,*'' http://www.geocities.com/mutmainaa/dua1/morn_and_evening.html. *Du'a* is the Arabic word for a prayer of supplication.

3. *Sahih Muslim,* hadith 475, cited from *The Alim,* software.

4. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* hadith 2.12, cited from *The Alim,* software.

5. See, for example, http://pages.britishlibrary.net/smb/halal.htm.

6. See, for example, the guidelines of the Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians, Toronto, Canada. These Halal guidelines can be found at the web site, http://www.jucanada.org/halalguidelines.htm.

7. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, *Forty Hadith Qudsi* (Beirut: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980), Hadith Qudsi 4, 48.

8. See for example, Yusuf Islam, *Prayers of the Last Prophet* (London, U.K.: Mountain of Light, 1998), 18, and many other sources with similar texts.

9. Sherman A. Jackson, "Jihad and the Modern World," *The Journal of Islamic Law and Culture,* 7 (Spring/Summer 2002): 1.

10. The most common supplication for travel is cited in Yusuf Islam, *Prayers of the Last Prophet*, 18. It includes part of the Qur'an and is as follows: "God is the greatest, God is the greatest, God is the greatest. How perfect is He, the One who has placed this [transport] at our service, for we ourselves would not have been capable of this. To our Lord is our final destiny. O God, we ask You for piety and blessing in this journey of ours, and we ask You for deeds which please You. O God, ease our journey and let us cover its distance quickly. O God, You are the companion on the journey and the Trustee of the family. O God, I take refuge with You from the difficulties of travel, from having a change of heart and being in a bad predicament, and I take refuge in You from an ill-fated outcome in wealth and family."

11. See for example, http://www.duas.org/routine.htm.

12. See for example, the map of Muslim populations from *The Islam Project,* 2003, http://www.theislamproject.org/education/Africa_Mideast_etc.html.

13. Umar Faruq Abdullah, *Islam and the Cultural Imperative, a Nawawi Foundation Paper* (Chicago, Illinois: The Nawawi Foundation, 2004). http://www.nawawi.org/courses/index_reading_room.html.

14. Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: the View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 185–207.

15. Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades, Volume III* (London, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 472.

16. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* hadith 8.336.

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2

Islam, Culture, and Women in a Bangladesh Village

Sarwar Alam

Whatever way it is defined, power is a factor that influences the lives of all people. In studying power and powerlessness in Appalachia, John Gaventa observed that the feeling of powerlessness comes about as a response to the perceived experience of defeat.[1] He found that belief systems that justify powerlessness as a natural condition are created by social and economic factors that lead one to think that a person does not have the power to affect one's course of life. This study complements Gaventa's findings by examining the perceptions of power and powerlessness among village women in Bangladesh. Power has different meanings for Bangladeshi men and women in many aspects of life, including decision making in the family or community, employment, health care, and education. Such differences in the understanding of power often stem from religion because power-laden issues such as inheritance, marriage and divorce, custody of children, and social mobility are governed, at least in part, by religious laws and customs. Hence, it is natural to conclude that religion would have an important influence on the perceptions of power and powerlessness among Muslim women in the rural communities of Bangladesh.

Experience shows that the statuses of men and women are not the same in many Muslim societies. This impression is reinforced by data such as the sex ratio of the population, maternal mortality rates at childbirth, and the different rates of adult literacy between men and women. In Bangladesh, the male–female ratio is 104:100, and 87 percent of the country's population is Muslim.[2] Bangladesh is also an agrarian country; 76.61 percent of its population live in rural areas and 51.3 percent of the civilian labor force are engaged in agriculture.[3] Although agriculture is the dominant sector of the economy, the government traditionally gives priority to urban development, which is reflected in the resource allocations of the central government's annual development programs. The unequal allocation of resources creates

unequal development patterns between urban and rural areas and between men and women in the country as a whole.

In addition, the rise of religious politics in recent decades has adversely affected the position of women. From the very inception of Bangladesh in 1971, the government has taken constitutional, legislative, and administrative initiatives to address inequalities between men and women. Such initiatives have included the establishment of equal rights for every citizen irrespective of gender, ethnicity, or faith; quotas for women in Parliament as well as in local government bodies; a family law ordinance, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, the Prohibition of Dowry Act, and the Violence Against Women and Children Act; tuition waivers and stipends for female students up to grade 12; and quotas for women in all public sector jobs.[4] Despite these governmental initiatives, however, disparities between the male and female populations of Bangladesh still exist, especially in the rural areas. For example, the adult literacy rate of urban and rural males is 77.1 and 57.3 percent, respectively, whereas the adult literacy rate for urban and rural females is 59.7 and 37.8 percent, respectively.[5] Life expectancy at birth is more equally distributed; it is 72.9 years for a male and 72.7 years for a female in the urban areas, but 67.1 years for a male and 66.2 years for a female in the rural areas. The maternal mortality rate per 1,000 live births is 2.7 in the urban areas, whereas it is 4.2 in the rural areas.[6] Disparity is also visible between males and females in the political arena. For example, out of 300 general Members of Parliament in Bangladesh, only seven are women.[7]

In discussing the roots of gender inequality, Amartya K. Sen has drawn attention to factors such as adapted perceptions, customary patterns, and social arrangements.[8] Some researchers have argued that gender inequality is related to intrahousehold decision-making processes that determine resource allocations for education, training, health, and nutrition.[9] Feminist theorists have discussed the issue of inequality and the subordination of women in terms of sexuality and the sexual division of labor resulting from social change, colonialism, dependency, and modernization.[10] Some researchers argue that women's issues are subsumed in the nationalist discourse without acknowledging women's sufferings and contributions, and the prevalence of inequalities between males and females.[11]

What are the causes of the inequalities between men and women in Bangladesh? It seems that there is no easy answer to this question. One cause might be the consequence of unequal power relations between men and women in most aspects of their lives. Others might include culture, the psychological acceptance of unequal relations by both males and females, or the physical and biological distinctiveness of females. Religion might also contribute to the unequal power relations that result in the subordination of women in the family and in the community. Such inequalities deprive women of an equal share in society and deny them the opportunity to participate in intrahousehold as well as community decision making.

How do rural women in Bangladesh perceive the limits of their power? Do they relate their perception of power or powerlessness to Islam? Do rural women in Bangladesh see themselves as an oppressed group? Do they have grievances against males? To date, few researchers have studied women's perceptions of the influence of Islam upon their lives. In 2005, I studied women's perceptions of power and powerlessness in a rural community in Bangladesh and investigated the influence of religion upon their perceptions. I asked, how do Muslim women of rural Bangladesh perceive Islam as a factor influencing their ability to make decisions in their families and in their communities? As part of my study, I paid special attention to issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and *purdah* (*parda* in Bangla, the language of Bangladesh), which influence rural women's participation in society. Findings from the ethnographic study and in-depth interviews discussed below suggest that deeply held beliefs, rooted in both the teachings and the culture of Islam, influence the perceptions of power and powerlessness among rural women in Bangladesh.

SITE AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Because the subjects of my study were rural Muslim women, I selected a site for my research based on three criteria: homogeneity of the local population, my command of the local dialect, and my ease of access to local community members and leaders. I decided to collect data from my native rural village in the subdistrict of Purbadhala in the Netrakona district. The village is homogenous in terms of religion (100 percent Muslim) and ethnic origin, I speak the same dialect of Bangla as the villagers do, and I have access to the leaders and members of that community. In fact, I spent my boyhood in this village. Many of my relatives and friends still live in that community, and I assumed that they would help me in gaining access to the people that I wanted to interview. The Purbadhala subdistrict is located approximately 100 miles north of the capital city of Dhaka, and approximately 15 miles northwest of the Netrakona district headquarters. The total population of the village I studied is 1,288.[12]

I studied the lifestyles of the women of the village, the influence of religion on their day-to-day lives, the extent of their personal relations, the religious rites that they practiced, the extent of their physical mobility, and the power relations in the family and in the community. During my fieldwork, I conducted in-depth interviews as well as informal conversations. This latter style of interview was necessary because nonliterate people in Bangladesh, and especially women, often feel uncomfortable with the prospect of structured formal interviews, tape-recorded conversations, and signing consent forms.[13]

I spent the period from January 2005 to July 2005 conducting fieldwork. I selected informants who were information-rich and to whom I had

relatively easy access. In all, I interviewed a randomly selected sample of 53 people, of whom 34 were women and 19 were men. In selecting the informants for the interviews, I noted the status and socioeconomic background of each person. It was my assumption that the information gathered from this cross section and background of informants would make the data more reliable (Table 2.1).

METHODOLOGY

In my research, I employed qualitative methods such as participant observation, informal conversations, in-depth interviews, and document collection. The theoretical aim of the study was to investigate the social construction of religious meaning among village women in Bangladesh. However, like other qualitative researchers, I was concerned with process as well as with meaning: that is, how does religion help people make sense of their lives, experiences, and structures of the world?[14] A qualitative researcher deals with the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and his subject, and the situational constraints that shape one's inquiry. To put it another way, qualitative research is concerned with how social experiences provide meaning in people's lives.[15] As Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman have observed, a qualitative researcher is like a detective.[16] Thus, by becoming a participant observer, I tried to play the role of a detective in order to discover the religious roots of the social construction of meaning among rural women in Bangladesh.

As indicated above I interviewed 53 people of the village, out of whom 34 were females and 19 were males. Among the female respondents, only 9 had either a high school education or above, and 12 were nonliterate. Among the male respondents, five had either a high-school education or above, and six

Table 2.1: Demographic Characteristics of Female Respondents

Category	**Number**	**Mean age (yrs)**	**Status**
Housewife	18	47.3	Dependent on husband
Housewife/Singer	1	38	Self-dependent
Widow	2	61.5	Head of family
Widow	2	64	Self-dependent
Widow	2	73.5	Dependent on son
Divorcee	1	45	Self-dependent/Head of family
Student	7	16.1	Dependent on fathers
Teacher	1	27	Self-dependent
Total	34		

were nonliterate. The respondents were randomly selected and represented each neighborhood of the village. In addition, I interviewed two government officials (a Joint Secretary and a Senior Assistant Secretary) from the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs.

While interviewing the female respondents, I was often assisted by one of my female cousins, a married graduate student majoring in Sociology. She carried out five interviews by herself. Interviews with the female respondents mostly took place in the daytime in open places that were visible to others but separate from the home. Interviews with male respondents mostly took place during the evening when they returned home from work. These interviews were conducted in more secluded places than were the women's interviews, although the crowded situation of many households sometimes made privacy difficult. In most cases, while conducting interviews, we insisted that the respondents focus on the relevant issues, but we intervened directly only when it was necessary to keep the respondents on track.

STAGES OF DATA COLLECTION

The first stage of my data collection was gaining entry into the social life of the village. My boyhood experiences and connections allowed me to survey the community and select the range of people I wanted to talk to and interview. Here, personal connections and prior acquaintances were an advantage in selection as well as observation. In addition, I tried to make sure that my presence would not affect the behavior patterns of people whom I wanted to observe. I tried to accomplish this goal by living with them and by creating a bond of friendship with them. Getting entry to the village was a challenge at first. My last long-term visit to the village was in 1994. However, my family's reputation and my status as a public servant helped me a great deal in being accepted in the community. The villagers showed real interest in my project when I told them that after the completion of my Ph.D. degree, and by dint of this research work, the name of the village would be stored forever in the body of scientific knowledge about Bangladesh.

In the second stage of my research, I began my observations by attending community meetings. I attended family and community gatherings for 24 weeks to observe interactions, language, the formation of groups, routines, rituals, and nonverbal communication. During this period, I conducted interviews and collected documents. I kept field notes and journal entries for each informant and wrote down my thoughts, queries, and confusions. I took particular note of the relevance of events that I encountered with respect to research problems and the overall theoretical framework. The third stage of my data collection was triangulation. After returning from the field, I compared observation notes with in-depth interview records and documents.

THE SETTING

The village that I studied in the subdistrict of Purbadhala has 1,288 inhabitants, of which 684 are males and 604 are females. The total number of households is 264, of which 20 are headed by women. The village consists of four neighborhoods (*paras*): *Pub* (East), *Pashchim* (West), *Dakkhin* (South), and *Chawlk* (Middle). It has one registered elementary school (grades 1–5), one *maktab* (an unregistered nongovernmental and locally managed religious school), and two mosques. The overall adult literacy rate of the village is 60.13 percent.[17] Among the adults in the village, only 14 (11 males and 3 females) have a baccalaureate (the equivalent of three years of college in the United States) or a higher level of education. In addition, there are five *hafizes* (those who have memorized the Qur'an), of whom only one is female.

There are also five overlapping groups of *baul* or *marfati* (folk or mystic) singers in the village. One of these groups is led by a woman. A number of men spend their leisure time in *jalsas,* gatherings of singers and listeners to folk or mystic songs, either as singers or as listeners. Mystical *marfati jalsas* are divided along the lines of the followers of *pirs,* holy mystic teachers. A few people in the village follow the strict principles of Tablighi Jama'at, a conservative movement of Islamic reform founded in India, and spend their leisure time in prayer. Except for the female *baul* singer noted above, no women participate in communal religious activities outside of their homes.

Other groups of males are involved in politics. The two major political parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, have followers and leaders in the village. Leaders of these parties have connections with influential urban politicians. They exercise power over community decision making, especially in selecting and electing local government representatives. Again, these are male domains; women do not have access to such political activities.

Other groups in the village are organized by microcredit providers, such as the Grameen Bank and BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). There may be as many as six microcredit organizations working in the village at a given time. Such organizations ostensibly provide small-scale business loans to groups of poor women. However, in reality, the husbands or male family members of the borrowers control most of these funds. There are also other groups of people who borrow money from individual moneylenders or *mohajans.*

The villagers hold collective observances of two religious festival days celebrated by all Muslims (*Eid ul Fitr* at the end of Ramadan and *Eid ul-Adha* during the Hajj pilgrimage period), plus *Shab-i-Barat* (the fifteenth night of the Islamic month of Sha'ban) and *Shab-i-Qadar* (the twenty-seventh night of the Islamic month of Ramadan). They also observe the fast of Ramadan and the day of *'Ashura* (the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram)

on an individual basis. National holidays such as Mother Language Day (February 21), Liberation Day (March 26), and Victory Day (December 16) have little or no impact upon the villagers. Instead, they participate in the *melas* (fairs) on the eve of *Pahela Baishakh* (the first day of the new year of the Bengali calendar) or in the *austamis* (fairs in remembrance of the Hindu God Lord Krishna). The latter festival of pre-Islamic origin continues to be popular despite the long history of Islam in Bangladesh. Community participation is also visible in *janajas* (funerals), *khatnas* (circumcisions), *mehmanies* (public feasts), *bi'e* (marriages), *miladunnabis* (rituals in honor of the Prophet's birth and death anniversaries), *akikas* (celebrations, and also public feasts for a child's birth), and *shalishes* or *bichars* (which are rural dispute-settlement bodies). Here again, community participation primarily means the participation of males.

The villagers maintain separate domains and spaces for males and females. In general, the division of labor is based on tradition, in which females—especially wives—are responsible for work inside the home, while males are expected to work outside the home. There are some exceptions where females work outside the home. This is especially the case for women who are extremely poor and work at a relative's or a neighbor's home. Spending time by oneself is not seen as desirable in village culture. People are expected to socialize with each other and frequent visits among neighbors, extended family members, or friends are much appreciated.

SOCIAL LIFE

Marriage

Marriage holds great importance within the village community (*samaj*). Marriage provides a woman with a sense of prestige and identity and ensures her social standing in the *samaj*. Marriage is heterosexual, a union between a man and a woman. There is evidence of homosexuality among some unmarried males in the village, but such relationships are private and isolated in nature and cease when one of the partners gets married. Although according to Hanafi jurisprudence every adult Muslim woman has the right to choose her own marriage partner, in reality it is either her father or her elder brother who chooses the spouse. The same is also true in determining the *mohr,* the dower. The payment of dowries is widely practiced in the village, despite the fact that it has been declared illegal by Bangladesh law. It may also be noted that polygamy is not practiced in the village, probably because of the strict bureaucratic requirements necessary to carry out this custom.[18] The bride and the groom never spend time with each other before marriage, for such practices are not appreciated by the *samaj*. The marriage market is male dominated, an observation that is consistent with previous findings.[19] Male dominance over marriage is also reflected in the word *bi'e,* the term used for

a marriage ceremony in the Bangla language. *Bi'e* comes from the Arabic word *bay'a,* which designates an oath or a pact of allegiance. In a marriage, the wife makes an oath of allegiance to the husband similar to the oath of allegiance made by a subject to a ruler. The average age difference between a husband and his wife is 10 years. Marriage is often seen as a way of expanding a relationship or a power base between two families or *gusthis* (patrilineal descent groups). Jean Ellickson,[20] John P. Thorp,[21] and Geoffrey D. Wood[22] observed similar trends in their research. As Jitka Kotalova[23] and Santi Rozario[24] have noted, the fact that marriage provides a woman with a social identity as a wife and later as a mother is a major reason why it is thought that a woman should marry at least once in her lifetime. Both Muslim and Hindu women in Purbadhala subdistrict are dependent on their fathers before marriage and on their husbands after marriage. This is a major factor in how a rural women's identity in Bangladesh is subsumed into male-dominated lines of descent.

Divorce

The existing law of Bangladesh has made it difficult for a husband to marry a second wife. However, he still enjoys significant advantages in the case of divorce.[25] A husband can divorce his wife at will with 90 days prior notice by making an application to the Chairman of the local Union Council. If the right to initiate a divorce is not delegated to the wife in the original marriage contract, she requires the court's intervention to divorce her husband.[26] By initiating a divorce, a wife risks her share in her husband's property, her entitlement to recoup her dower, and the right to claim a maintenance allowance after the divorce. During my research, I found that the majority of villagers were aware of a woman's right to initiate a divorce in principle. However, they were not clear about how this right was to be applied. Some were confused about the difference between the provisions of the secular law and the Shari'a. According to Shari'a law, a husband can divorce his wife at will and he is not required to give notice to his wife through a mediating institution. In contrast, the right of a wife to divorce her husband is severely limited under the Shari'a, and she is required to proceed through the judicial system upon initiating divorce.[27] Not everybody is aware of such distinctions, and the nongovernment organizations operating in the village were not successful at making every woman aware of her legal rights in this regard.

In actual practice, the end of a marriage for a rural woman in Bangladesh results in the loss of emotional support, a loss of prestige, and economic ruin. This usually compels a woman to return to her parental home with shame and the prospect of becoming an economic burden on her family. During the period of my research in the village, I found no instance where a wife

initiated a divorce against her husband. However, there were several cases where husbands divorced their wives but refused to provide the required maintenance allowance after the divorce.

Inheritance

The inheritance rules of the village are based on the Shari'a law of inheritance, where a daughter inherits half the amount of a son. A Muslim wife has a share in the property of her husband. When her husband dies, the widow inherits one-eighth of his property. If he dies childless, she inherits one-fourth. The rest of the property is passed on to the husband's closest relatives. If no son is born to a couple, daughters alone cannot inherit all of the property of their parents. In such a case, part of the property goes to the sons of the father's brother.[28] During my time in the village, I did not find any evidence of a woman claiming the portion of inheritance that was her right from her natal family. When asked about this departure from Shari'a law, some respondents said that they did not claim their inheritance rights because of love. Others said that deferring their inheritance helped assure the support of their family in case of divorce or widowhood. This is consistent with the findings of other researchers.[29] A wife must maintain some security against the possibility that she will be widowed or divorced. Should either of these misfortunes befall her, she has little recourse but to return to her childhood home. If she does not take the inheritance that is due to her under law, it is likely that her brothers will take her back with greater willingness and grace than would be the case if she had angered them by taking her share of the inheritance.

Parda

Women of the village were very concerned about *parda* (also known as *purdah*). This concept literally means "hiding one's face" but in practice, it refers to a set of rules and regulations that determines women's interactions in society. "Observing *parda* is an integral part of a Muslim woman's life," argued many of my informants. Others observed, "Those who do not observe *parda* are *besharam* (shameless)." There are different ways of observing *parda,* depending on the age and social status of women. Children and elderly women do not observe *parda* but women of marriageable age are supposed to observe the practice. However, *parda* does not have to be observed every time a woman leaves the home. For example, women who visit their next-door neighbors do not cover their faces with an additional garment. In general, women use an additional garment known as a *chadar* (similar to the Iranian *chador*) to cover the upper body and head while visiting neighborhoods within the village. When women visit a different village, such as

when they visit their natal family members from another village, they use the traditional *burqa,* a long single garment that covers the head, instead of the *chadar*. Whatever the type of garment, *parda* plays a major role in determining the nature of women's interactions with others in the community and between communities. However, gone are the days, observed one female informant, when a man could hardly ever see a woman from outside her community. As an example of the virtues of the "golden days," she mentioned the story of the marriage night of the great Sufi saint *Bara Pir* Hazrat Abdul Quadir Zilani,[30] whose wife was supposed to be crippled and blind:

> *Bara Pir* married his wife without ever seeing her, as was the tradition in those golden days. On their very first night together, *Bara Pir Saheb* came out of his bedroom and found a beautiful woman in his bed. He went straight to his *shashur*(father-in-law) and asked him whether there was any mistake. His *shashur* smiled and told *Bara Pir,* "I described my daughter as crippled because she has never gone out of her home; she does not know how to go out. I described her as blind because she has not seen any male except me in her life. Go to her my child, that beautiful girl in your bedroom is very much your wife. Nobody made a mistake."

Some informants argued that to become *pardanashin,* observant of *parda,* is a matter of prestige for a Muslim woman because it marks a difference from the followers of other religions. *Parda* and the seclusion it entails play a major role in determining the cultural construction of work and the sexual division of labor in the rural communities of Bangladesh.[31] It is also a powerful means of social control in these communities.[32]

Purity and Pollution

The villagers also exhibited a strong sense of purity and pollution. This is particularly important with regard to the virginity of unmarried women, which, it is believed, helps sustain the honor of the *paribar* (family). Researchers have observed that keeping the bodies of nubile females intact is an asset for the family and is a form of symbolic capital that ensures honor and acceptance for a woman in the community. Purity also refers to a woman's self-control and virtue. The virginity of an unmarried woman proves that she is both restrained and virtuous. Rape pollutes a woman's body and renders her unmarriageable. Pollution also occurs because of sexual misconduct. Since both rape and sexual misconduct make a woman unfit for marriage, there is a tendency to "blame the victim" in cases of rape, which may lead to personal and family tragedies in extreme cases.

Pollution has another dimension as well, which is a product of women's biology, in that it is linked to women's menstrual periods. Women are perceived as impure during their menstrual periods, which marginalizes them religiously as well as socially. Although most schools of Shari'a law regard the

blood of menstruation as no worse than that caused by a cut, it is seen differently in Bangladesh culture. The fact that a woman cannot pray or enter a mosque during menstruation means that women are impure by nature. Several of my informants argued that the punishment for eating *gandom,* the prohibited fruit tasted by Eve in the Garden of Eden, was her menstruation. Because of attitudes such as these, David Abecassis has concluded, "[Muslim women in Bangladesh] are cut off from the mainstream of society and from the most important processes of power and decision making, not just by *parda* but by the attitudes which lie behind it; they are cut off from God and from other men and women by pollution-related ideas and by religious practice."[33]

The Shalish

Disputes that cannot be settled within the family are brought before the *shalish* or *bichar,* a council led by village elders who are popularly known as *matbars.* While studying the concept of power in a rural district of Bangladesh, Thorp (1978) found that each residential brotherhood has a leader who is a major landowner as well as having the skill and knowledge in settling disputes in a *shalish* or a *bichar.* A chosen leader of the community may order this person to punish an offender from within the family group, or isolate a person or a family from the *samaj* as a punishment.[34] The *shalish* was created as an instrument to maintain social control and to concentrate power in the hands of influential villagers. Leadership in the *shalish* mostly depends on the possession of landed property, personal reputation, and connections with influential public officials.

The *shalish* imposes its will through threats to honor and the inducement of shame. Sometimes, it also dispenses judgments that result in divorce or corporal punishments. A meeting of the s*halish* can be convened by any male disputant, a village elder, or a religious leader. If a *shalish* is convened for settling a dispute related to inheritance, divorce, the observance of *parda,* or adultery, a religious leader presides over the session. This religious leader is usually the local *Imam,* who leads the congregational Friday prayers in the mosque. Sometimes, the *shalish* is headed by a *mufti* (Islamic jurist), who participates to judge the issue in dispute from the point of view of Islamic law. If the *shalish* is headed by such a person, he may pronounce a decree (*fatwa*) that might entail the beating, lashing, or even stoning to death of the alleged offender. Village women cannot sit as members of the *shalish.* When they appear as the accused or as victims, they usually defend themselves through their male relatives.[35] Ironically, a *fatwa* does not have any legal recognition in Bangladesh. In January 2001, the High Court Division of the Bangladesh Supreme Court declared *fatwas* illegal. In this judgment, Justice Golam Rabbani and Justice Najmun Ara Sultana, the first female high

court judge in Bangladesh, observed that the legal system of Bangladesh empowers only the state courts to decide all questions relating to legal opinions, thus making a *fatwa* illegal. Although the government of Bangladesh challenged the ruling, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the High Court. The case is still pending with the Appellate Division.[36]

During the period of my fieldwork, nobody recalled any *fatwa*-related incidents or disputes having occurred in the recent past. However, a number of incidents resulted in the convening of a *shalish*. One *shalish* was convened against the female folk singer of the village. She described this dispute, which occurred some years previously, in the following words:

> When I started a *jalsa* (a session of religious and folk singing) in the front yard of my house, and when I started participating in *jalsas* in other villages, our *matbars* organized a *shalish* against me because of my alleged shamelessness. They said that my behavior was causing harm to the honor of our village. They asked my husband to bring me before the *shalish*. We went there. They asked my husband many questions, and later directed my husband to divorce me. But my husband played a trick. He told the *matbars* of the *shalish* that he would follow their directive, but that he needed some time because we have small children. Then we fled, first my husband and then I. I spent so many days in *parabash* (exile)! I returned home, and so did my husband, when everything cooled down.

PERCEPTIONS OF POWER

Men and women are perceived as separate beings in rural Bangladesh, and each of them has a separate domain for decision making. A woman is not supposed to interfere in men's affairs, and a man is not supposed to interfere in women's affairs. The female folk singer who organized a *jalsa* session in the account reproduced above transgressed such a boundary. Familial and social relationships are thought to be based on religious directives, although such ''directives'' often contradict the actual teachings of the Qur'an. Females in rural Bangladesh are seen as the shadows of their male counterparts within the institutional framework of the family (*paribar*). The identity of a woman as an independent, autonomous self is hardly recognized in this male-dominated society. According to one of my male informants:

> From the very beginning of creation, Allah created Adam as a male, not as a female. Therefore, males are Allah's preferred creatures. To ease the loneliness of Adam, Allah created *Hawa* (Eve) from Adam's left rib. Thus, Hawa is a part of Adam's body. Hawa's prayer was synonymous with providing pleasure to Adam. (Note: The Arabic root of *Hawa* is related to the word for passion.) Thus, Hawa's first priority was not to satisfy Allah but Adam. The same is true in the family. The wife's first priority is to make her husband happy, this is her prayer. She should wipe her husband's wet feet with her hair the way *Ma* (mother) Fatima (the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad) used to do for her

husband. It is better for a wife to offer her husband one *khili* of *paan* (betel leaf and nut) with a smile than to offer *nafal namaj* (supererogatory prayers) throughout the night.

Often, a woman's perception of the role and status of other females is even harsher than that of a male. A female informant characterized the ideal woman and wife in the following terms:

The ideal woman is she who takes care of her husband, children, and in-laws. Taking care of her husband is everything for her (*shamir shebai tar shabkichu*). This is because the wife's heaven is located beneath the feet of her husband (*shamir paer niche strir behest*). She does everything she can to ensure happiness of her husband. The ideal wife is she who keeps a rope (*dori*) ready in case her husband wants to tie her up, and who keeps a cane (*bet*) ready in case her husband wants to beat her.

Although marriage provides a form of shelter for the wife, she holds a position in the family that is not equal to that of her husband. ''It is [my husband] who brought me here. Allah made him superior to me, Allah made the husband superior from the day of creation. It is my sacred duty to obey him,'' said one of my female informants. Another female informant said, ''It is [the husband's] family, [the husband's] children, and [the husband's] wife, so it is his responsibility to maintain the family.'' Another female informant said, ''For me, power means the one who has wealth, the one who has power [over others]. One who has the ability to run a family is powerful.'' Another view expressed by a woman informant is as follows: ''The male is superior (*purush boro*) because he gives everything to his wife during marriage. He ensures her *parda,* keeps her in honor, and provides for her food and clothes. If these are his responsibilities, then is he not superior? To me he is superior.'' Another informant noted, ''The husband has the power because he has wealth, land, and money. He can go anywhere; it does not matter whether it is day or night, evening or morning, hot summer or cold winter. But I cannot do so. It is Allah who gave this power to husbands.''

The majority of informants held that power (*khamata*) is the ability of a person or a group to act autonomously. Sources of *khamata* might be wealth, education, or political connections, but overall, the real source of all power is Allah (*sakal khamatar malik Allah*). It is Allah who makes one person powerful and another person powerless. Among men and women, the men are blessed with power by Allah. A major reason for this blessing is the division of labor, which is viewed as a natural, unchangeable condition, in which men provide food and wealth for the family and the women take care of the home. As one female informant explained:

Power came from Allah. He gave this to us to cultivate land so that we could survive. Allah asked us to do this, to cultivate in order to survive. Allah gave this power to males. Allah said, ''I am sending you to the earth to cultivate it. You will earn according to your ability.'' Thus, the male is the owner of the family

> (*shonsharer malik*). He is the guardian. I am also an owner, but a minor one; he is the major owner. It is natural that he enjoys more power because he is a man; it is also natural that I enjoy less power because I am a woman.

The statuses of men and women and their perceptions of power in the rural Muslim communities of Bangladesh were first described and analyzed by Thorp nearly 30 years ago. The subjects of his study, like my informants, perceived that men and women are descendants of Adam, who was created by Allah out of the earth in order that man might possess the earth and be its master (*malik*). Because of this, the person who possesses land is most like Adam and thus is a perfect individual. Thorp maintained that rural people in Bangladesh believed that Allah created *Hawa,* Adam's wife, from Adam's body as an autonomous creature, although she is dependent on her husband. Because Hawa was created from Adam, a male *malik* considers his wife part of himself. A husband and a wife are equal partners in the reproductive process, and a wife might become *adhikari,* "masterful," by inheriting lands. However, Thorp observed, "A wife is not her husband's equal in the political or economic fields, or in the field of public religious activity. However, she is considered to have equal authority (*saman adhikar*) in intra-family affairs."[37] As a "junior partner" with her husband in ownership—to use the metaphor employed by one of my female informants above—the most important external power that is theoretically possessed by the wife is her ability to sell or mortgage her land. Thorp, whose position on women's power and autonomy in rural Bangladesh is more optimistic than my own, comments:

> Women are capable of assuming and carrying out the responsibilities of *maliks* [owners] because they share the same fundamental constitution as their husbands. The dominant element in their constitution, like that of their husbands, is earth, with the strength and skill (*sakti/khamata*) it contains. Their creation is dependent upon receiving part of a bone from their husbands, but with it they receive the basic capacity and talent (*khamata*) that distinguished Adam from all the things whose names he learned and from the angels as well.[38]

Despite Thorp's optimistic view of the theoretically equal nature of men and women in rural Bangladesh, my research reveals that a woman may have the right to inherit land and dower, and to manage properties and household affairs, but that such rights are ascribed primarily within the purview of her male-dominated household. Even in religion, women's social space is starkly separated from that of men. A woman's identity is ascribed as a daughter, a wife, a sister, or a mother, but not as an *Imam,* a religious teacher, or even a religious singer. One also finds that religious leaders and local landowners, who for the most part are men, act together in the determination of family and community affairs through institutions such as the *shalish.* Such institutions are powerful supports for the assumption of male power and dominance. Above all, it is the ownership and autonomous disposition of land that gives a *malik* mastery over the family and eventually over the

community. Religion provides the moral justification for such mastery by influencing prevailing notions of right or wrong, good or bad, or proper or improper.

Marriage in Islam is a civil union between a man and a woman. Marriage has three salient characteristics: (1) a contract, (2) consent of the groom and bride, and (3) payment of *mohr* (dower) by the groom to the bride. An Islamic marriage is not a sacrament; rather, it is a civil contract between a man and a woman that creates a relationship between them.[39] If any one of the partners breaches the contract, the marriage could be dissolved. In the culture of Bangladesh, marriage is regarded as a union of two individuals as well as of two families, legalizing intercourse and the procreation of children. According to Hanafi jurisprudence, the free consent of the man and the woman is obligatory to make this union legal. Payment of the *mohr* (dower) to the wife by the husband is an integral part of a marriage, and this payment is an obligation for the husband. For a married woman, the right to receive and keep the *mohr* is a source of self-esteem. Shahla Haeri holds that Islamic marriage is a contract that involves a sort of ownership by a man over a woman's reproductive organs in exchange for the dower that a man pays to a woman.[40] Kecia Ali has argued, according to early Islamic jurisprudence, ''Marriage is a bilateral transaction that establishes unilateral control'' by the husband over the wife's reproductive capabilities.[41] ''In marriage, the dower is exchanged for control (authority, ownership: *milk*) over the wife or, more particularly, over her sexual organ.''[42] Thus, the belief in Bangladesh that a man has majority ownership over the marriage partnership is consistent with the reasoning of Islamic jurisprudence. However, from the participant observation and interviews I conducted in 2005, it appears that Muslim women in rural Bangladesh are either not conscious or not fully aware of their right to a contract, their right to free consent to the marriage, and also about their right to dispose of their own property within a marriage.

In rural Bangladesh, the notion of a woman's agency is centered on her reproductive capacity. A woman receives recognition as a full individual only after her first pregnancy. She receives another level of recognition if she bears a male child. It is believed that women are responsible for conceiving male or female children. Restrictions that are imposed upon the woman by social customs or religious beliefs are taken for granted. She expands her agency by taking on responsibilities in her family within these socially recognized parameters. On the other hand, husbands are expected to provide adequate income and protection. One of my female informants argued, ''No woman wants to work outside her family. It is men's duty to keep their women inside, within *parda*. What a woman wants is husband (*shami*), family (*shongshar*), and children (*chelemeye*).''

Regarding the wife's place among her husband's family, another female informant said,

> Because I came to a man's home I have to obey him. He did not come to my home; rather, he brought me to his home; hence, he is superior, so I have to obey him. First comes the husband, then come other worldly matters. I have worked very hard, but I have never considered leaving my husband and marrying somebody else to avoid these hardships. I told myself, "Well, this is the only marriage I will have. I will die one day, so let me pass through this life." One cannot throw away her husband. After all, he is the husband. One cannot leave her husband if she has faith in religion. I am following the religion. Let me pass this life in my husband's home.

In rural Bangladesh, Islam determines the boundaries and spaces of interaction between males and females through the institution of *parda*. According to my informants, Allah predetermined the spaces of social interaction for both males and females. However, from Rozario's (1992) research in another rural community of Bangladesh, we find that Hindus and Christians also observe *parda*. *Parda* is thus part of Bengali culture irrespective of religious orientation. *Parda* existed even before the advent of Islam in Bangladesh. The practice of *parda* differs among women on the basis of their economic condition, education, and religiosity. However, it is widely perceived that a woman's world is different from that of a man. In rural Bangladesh, a woman's world is supposed to consist of her family, irrespective of her level of education or wealth. Her legitimate goals are getting married, having children, and nurturing the family. The ability to accomplish these goals constitutes a sort of power, although it is limited in scope. Religion helps the woman become a better wife, a better mother, and a better member of the family. It gives her confidence in her role and a feeling of strength. On the other hand, education, wealth, and external support may help a woman gain a stronger position in the family and may even expand her influence beyond the family. For the rural women I interviewed, power means the ability to accomplish goals and influence others. According to one female respondent, males have the ability to influence others because "earning is the sole responsibility of the male. A female cannot earn, and thus males are powerful. This is also the directive of the religion. Religion also asks us to worship males."

The consensus of my informants was that within the village community, the wealthy and educated males have the power. From wealth comes education and personal connections with other wealthy people or political leaders. Only a very few people, those whom Allah prefers, can accumulate wealth. Women may also accumulate wealth through inheritance or through other means, but they do not play a role in community affairs. Although the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the leader of the opposition party in Parliament have been women for more than a decade, the majority of the villagers believe that political office is not a proper occupation for a woman and that those who are elected to such positions will go to Hell.

CONCLUSION: ISLAM AND POWER IN RURAL BANGLADESH

Max Weber defined power (*Macht*) as the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests."[43] Weber described power in relation to control, authority, and legitimacy. According to him, control is exercised by the command of the power holder as well as the loyalty and obedience of the group the power holder commands. In this regard, he held, "All conceivable qualities of a person and all conceivable combinations of circumstances may put him in a position to impose his will in a given situation." By virtue of obedience, this command receives the necessary authority, and thus legitimacy, which ultimately allows the power holder to use force or coercion in order to gain control over the group he commands.

In the rural communities of Bangladesh, males possess the authority and legitimacy of command, and "the basis on which this probability rests" is culture and religion. From the statements reproduced above, it can be seen that women's perceived agency and their sense of power and powerlessness, are contingent to a considerable degree on their perception of Islam. At the same time, their perception of Islam is greatly influenced by the prevailing cultural practices of their region and community. Whatever rights and privileges Islam provides for women are subsumed within the patriarchal culture of their village and region. Religion is seen as a major support for this culture. According to my informants, wealth, education, and connections to influential people are the main sources of power and these are contingent upon God's blessings. Female informants perceive that their identity is subject to the will of their husbands, who have access to wealth and education. Furthermore, because of their greater autonomy in society, they have greater opportunities to develop connections with influential people.

In short, the female informants that I interviewed perceive power as the ability to act in a way that influences another's behavior. This belief recalls Robert A. Dahl's definition of power. Dahl similarly contended that power is the ability to influence the behavior of others. In his chapter, "The Concept of Power," he describes power in the following terms: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do."[44] Dahl argued that power also depends on *resources* or *bases* of power (opportunities, acts, or objects), *means* or *instruments* of power (threats or promises), the *range* or *scope* of power (B's response to A), and the *amount* or *extent* of power (the probability of power being exercised successfully in conjunction with the means and scope of power). In their response to Dahl, Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz argued that power also has a second face, which they called "non-decision-making"—the

attempt to prevent an issue from ever reaching the decision-making stage.[45] They noted that a person uses power not only to influence the behavior of another but also to exclude the other from participating in the decision-making process. This tactic of ''non–decision making'' depends on the mobilization of bias. The paradigm of bias was developed by Elmer Schattschneider, who argued, ''All forms of organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out.''[46]

Bachrach and Baratz also held that the exclusionary aspect of power sustains a form of bias that favors the values, myths, rituals, and institutions of a dominant group relative to the others. They maintained that the exercise of autonomous decision making could be prevented by force, threat of sanctions, manipulating symbols, or creating new barriers to participation.[47]

Steven Lukes extended the approaches developed by Dahl, Bachrach, and Baratz and added what he called ''power's third dimension.'' He held that a person exercises power over another not merely by direct action or by creating barriers to participation but also by ''influencing, shaping, or determining his very wants.''[48] He also maintained that powerless people ''accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial.''[49] This might occur, he argued, by controlling another's thoughts or by affecting another's perceptions through social forces and institutional practices that affect individuals' decisions. Gaventa, in his study of power and powerlessness among Appalachian Valley people, showed how socialization as well as ideology influenced the behaviors of the majority. His findings, he argued, warrant ''the study of social myths, language, and symbols, and how they are shaped or manipulated in power processes.''[50]

The findings of Dahl, Bachrach, Baratz, Lukes, and Gaventa are borne out in the results of my ethnographic study of a rural village in Bangladesh. Males have power over females to the extent that they can get females to do things that they would not otherwise do. The men of rural villages in Bangladesh possess the *resources* of power (property, education, greater mobility) they wield the *instruments* of power (for example, by convening the *shalish* or *bichar* councils) and they exercise the ''second face'' of power by using such instruments to compel an attitude of ''non–decision making'' on the part of women. Institutions such as the *paribar* (family unit) and the *shalish/bichar* (ad hoc councils) are male-dominated, and thus may be used to exert the pressure of mobilization bias against females. In addition, the sanctions that are imposed by the *shalish/bichar* are a potent deterrent for any behavior that is considered undesirable.

Most important, rural women in Bangladesh take the dominance of men for granted. The basis of male dominance is rooted in the belief system of their community, which depends largely on religion. In his famous definition of religion as a cultural system, Clifford Geertz stated: "Religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[51] Geertz argued that religion is one of the essential elements of culture through which the dynamics of symbols are expressed.[52] The overlapping relation between religion and culture can be seen in the fact that cultural patterns "give meaning, i.e. objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves."[53] In a similar manner, the Christian theologian Paul Tillich maintained, "Religion is the essence of culture and culture is the form of religion."[54] He further noted that all human experience occurs within a cultural milieu and that religion provides culture with form and content but also meaning, a process he called the "import of meaning."[55] For the women of rural Bangladesh, it appears that the institutions of a patriarchal culture whose roots were prior to Islam, combined with the institutions and practices of Islam to subsume the autonomous identity of woman by relegating them to a position of "non-decision-making." In this situation, the rural woman is taught to regard herself as the shadow of a man. What Allah gives to man, is given to woman only because she is part of a man, not a whole unto herself. Thus, to paraphrase a famous passage of the Bible, "What God gives, a man can take away."

NOTES

1. John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

2. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh 2003* (Dhaka: Government Printing Press, 2005), 3, 424.

3. Ibid., 3, 149.

4. See, for example, Article 28 of the Constitution of Bangladesh; Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *Narir Ainee Odhikar* (Legal Rights of Women) (Dhaka: Technical Assistance for Gender Facility and institutional Support for Implementation of the National Action Plan Project, 2000); and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *An Introduction to Development Projects* (Dhaka, 2004).

5. Bangladesh, Ministry of Planning, *Bangladesh Data Sheet 1999,* available at http://www.bbsgov.org.

6. *Statistical Pocket Book of Bangladesh 2003,* 136–137.

7. In the Parliament election of 2001, only six female candidates won seats, and later another woman won in a by-election. Results of the original election are available at the Bangladesh Election Commission's website, http://www.ece.gov.bd/stat/Index/htm.

8. Amartya K. Sen, "Women, Technology and Sexual Divisions," *Trade and Development—An UNCTAD Review* 6 (1985): 195–223; see also, idem, *Rationality and Freedom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002).

9. World Bank, *Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1995).

10. For example, see Carolyn M. Elliot, "Theories of Development: An Assessment," in *Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change,* eds. B.X. Bunster et al. (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 1–8.

11. For a detailed discussion of the place of women in nationalist discourses, see Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Chandra's death, 34–62; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

12. Census conducted by the present author.

13. See Jenneke Arens and Jos V. Beurden, *Jhagrapur: Poor Peasants and Women in a Village in Bangladesh* (Birmingham, U.K.: Third World Publications, 1977).

14. See Sharon B. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1988).

15. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research, Second Edition,* eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Newbury Park, California: Sage Press, 2000) 1–28.

16. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, eds., *Designing Qualitative Research,* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1999).

17. Census conducted by the present author. Statistically, an adult is a person who is 15 years of age or older.

18. According to the Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961, polygamy is not illegal but difficult. Written permission of the first wife is necessary for the husband to have a second wife, which then must be justified and endorsed by the Chairman of the Union Council. It is thus easier for a husband to divorce his first wife than to gain her permission to marry a second wife.

19. A. Miranda, "Nuptility in Bangladesh," *Journal of Social Studies,* no. 9 (1980): 58–98.

20. Jean Ellickson, "A Believer among Believers: The Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Meanings in a Village in Bangladesh" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1972).

21. John P. Thorp, "Masters of Earth: Conceptions of Power among Muslims of Rural Bangladesh" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978).

22. Geoffrey D. Wood, "Class Differentiation and Power in Bandakgram: The Minifundist Case," in *Exploitation and the Rural Poor: A Working Paper on the Rural*

Power Structure in Bangladesh, ed. M.A. Huq (Comilla, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1976), 60–96.

23. Jitka Kotalova, *Belonging to Others: Cultural Construction of Womanhood Among Muslims in a Village in Bangladesh* (Uppsala, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1993).

24. Santi Rozario, *Purity and Communal Boundaries: Women and Social Change in a Bangladeshi Village* (North Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

25. The Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961.

26. See for details, Saira R. Khan, *The Socio-Legal Status of Bangali Women in Bangladesh: Implications for Development* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press, 2001).

27. For a detailed discussion and review of the laws of divorce in other Muslim countries, see Alamgir M. Serajuddin, *Shari'a Law and Society: Tradition and change in South Asia* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2001).

28. See Khan, *Socio-Legal Status of Bangali Women;* see also, Taslima Monsoor, *From Patriarchy to Gender Equality: Family Law and Its Impact on Women in Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press, 1999); and Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871–1977* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995).

29. See Kirsten Westergaard, *State and Rural Society in Bangladesh*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series no. 49 (London/Malmö, U.K./Sweden: Curzon Press, 1985).

30. Abdul Quadir Zilani, popularly known as *Bara* Pir, was a famous Sufi saint of twelfth-century Baghdad. Known to history as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166 CE), he was the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, one of the most widespread Sufi confraternities in the Muslim world.

31. For detailed information on the social effects of *parda,* see Sajeda Amin, "The Poverty-Purdah Trap in Rural Bangladesh: Implications for Women's Roles in the Family," Working Paper Series no. 75 (New York: Research Division, The Population Council, 1995).

32. Shelley Feldman, "Purdah and Changing Patterns of Social Control among Rural Women in Bangladesh," *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 45 no. 4 (1983): 949–960.

33. David Abecassis, *Identity, Islam, and Human Development in Rural Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press, 1990), 57.

34. See for further details Peter J. Bertocci, "Models of Solidarity, Structures of Power: The Politics of Community in Rural Bangladesh," in *Political Anthropology Yearbook 1,* ed., Myron J. Aronoff (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1990), 97–125; Rafiuddin Ahmed, ed. "Islam and the Social Construction of the Bangladesh Countryside," *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretative Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71–85.

35. See, for example, Taj I. Hashmi, *Women and Islam in Bangladesh: Beyond Subjugation and Tyranny* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

36. See the US State Department's website http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51616.htm retrieved on March 29, 2005 and also Amnesty Internationals

website http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGASA130012001?open&of=ENG-BGD retrieved on April 03, 2006.

37. Thorp, ‘‘Masters of Earth,’’ 68.

38. Ibid., 74.

39. On early Islamic jurisprudential opinions on marriage, see Kecia Ali, ‘‘Money, Sex, and Power: The contractual Nature of Marriage in Islamic Jurisprudence of the Formative Period’’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2002).

40. Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 34.

41. Ali, ‘‘Money, Sex, and Power,’’ 475.

42. Ibid., 354.

43. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* trans. M. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 152–153.

44. Robert A. Dahl, ‘‘The Concept of Power,’’ *Behavioral Science* 2 (July 1957): 202–203.

45. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, ‘‘Two Faces of Power,’’ *American Political Science Review* 56 (December 1962): 947–952.

46. Elmer E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 71.

47. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 42–46.

48. Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London, U.K.: Macmillan, 1974), 23.

49. Ibid., 24.

50. Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness,* 15.

51. Clifford Geertz, ‘‘Religion as a Cultural System,’’ in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, ed. M. Banton (London, U.K.: Tavistock, 1966), 1–46.

52. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books 1973), 4.

53. Geertz, ‘‘Religion as a Cultural System,’’ 1966, 8.

54. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press 1959), 42.

55. Paul Tillich, *What is Religion?* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 59.

3

Marriage in Islam

Nargis Virani

The Qur'an is the foundational and inspirational basis of all Islamic laws, albeit interpreted and adapted to the historical and contemporary circumstances and situations of various groups. Over the last century, some of the traditional rulings related to the person and the family were codified in a modern category known as Muslim Family Law. One or another version of Muslim Family Law is in force in most Muslim countries today. In other countries where Muslims do not form a majority, there may be a provision for the application of Muslim Family Law for its Muslim population. For example, enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of India is the right of Indian Muslims to be governed by Muslim Family Law in their personal and religious affairs.

Over time, besides the Qur'an, other sources of law were developed and acknowledged. These played a highly significant role in the codification of Islamic Law in general, and family law in particular. Where the specificities of particular situations were not directly addressed in the Qur'an, or where the application of a specific verse of the Qur'an to a particular situation permitted several interpretations, Muslim jurists customarily turned to the Sunna, including the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, the jurists routinely resorted to *ijtihad* (personal, intellectual, and jurisprudential endeavor), which resulted in a system of reasoning and interpretation that developed important foundational principles over the course of several centuries of implementation. One such principle states that laws may change according to time, place, and circumstance. There is a clear recognition that previously unencountered situations demand the boundaries of Islamic law to be reexamined and, if necessary, expanded, albeit within the confines of Qur'anic regulations. Theoretically, this principle offers a reasonable degree of flexibility for the application of Islamic law at all times and for all communities. In practice, however, the *ijtihad* of jurists on all matters generally, and on marriage and divorce particularly, was often partial to their various environments. In addition, the male gender of almost all jurists until

contemporary times, irrespective of the particular school of jurisprudence, resulted in the exclusion of the female perspective.

Nowadays, matters related to marriage and divorce fall under the rubric of Muslim Family Law. In the earlier periods of Islamic history, however, Muslim Family Law was not codified. Thus, each judge resorted to the Qur'an and Hadith when faced with a certain issue and performed his own *ijtihad*. Over time, different schools of legal thought became established. This resulted in diverse groups influenced by varied sectarian and theological persuasions, as well as different ruling powers, which selected the jurisprudence of a particular school as the basis of their legal system. This practice continues in our times. The major schools of Islamic law are the Maliki, Hanbali, Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Ja'fari (largely followed by the Twelver Shiites), named as such after their founder figures. An important point to note is that it is possible to encounter substantial jurisprudential variations between schools and among different scholars within each school.

THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

In Islam, marriage is an institution in which a man and a woman are joined in a physical, social, and legal relationship. The Qur'an lays down the foundations of the physical and social aspects of the institution of marriage and specifies some of the legal rules that govern them. It also stipulates clear rules for the dissolution of marriage in the unfortunate case that the marriage becomes unsustainable. Hence, both marriage and divorce are issues that are discussed extensively in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an conceives of marriage as a civil contract between a man and a woman. As such, it is governed by rules that define the relationship between two contracting parties. Marriage is the favored institution for a legitimate sexual relationship between a man and a woman. The Qur'an recognizes sexuality as a central feature of the natural world and consequently as an innate and vital dimension of human existence. Thus, even though it lays down certain rules that govern human sexuality (for example, within the confines of marriage), it authorizes sexual pleasure and does not only condone sex for the sake of procreation.

In premodern times, concubinage was a possible secondary institution whereby a man purchased a female slave and contracted a sexual relationship with her. Outside of the institutions of marriage and concubinage, however, the Qur'an views all other sexual relationships as illicit. Either explicitly or by implication, it condemns incest, adultery, fornication, prostitution, promiscuity, lewdness, and homosexuality. It also stipulates punishments for such infringements. Chastity is an essential virtue demanded of all Muslims, both men and women alike. Marriage is desirable for every member of the Muslim community, even for slaves. Celibacy is not regarded as a virtue. The Prophet

Muhammad is reported to have said, "There is no monasticism in Islam." He is also reported to have given the following advice to his followers: "Whoever is well-off, let him marry, for he who does not marry is not one of us." He also stated, "Oh assembly of young men! Whoever can afford to marry, let him do so, for it is more effective in lowering one's gaze and keepings one's privates chaste. Whoever cannot do this, should fast, for it has the effect of restraining lust."

Allowable sexual relations in the Qur'an are designated by the term *nikah,* which connotes both marriage and intercourse (Qur'an 2:221, 230, 232, 235, 237; 4:3, 6, 22, 25, 127; 24:3, 23, 33, 60; 28:27; 33:49, 50, 53). Marriage prevents sexual frustration and the temptation to sin (Qur'an 24:32). Married persons, in other words, those with a licit sexual partner, are called *muhsan* (masc.) or *muhsana* (fem.), "guarded" or "fortified." Illicit sex or contraventions of sexual conventions are called *fahisha* (Qur'an 3:135; 4:15, 19, 22, 25; 6:151; 7:28, 33, 80; 17:32; 24:19; 27:54; 29:28; 33:30; 42:37; 53:32; 65:1). The collective term *al-fahsha'* also appears in the Qur'an (Qur'an 2:169, 268; 7:28; 12:24; 16:90; 24:21; 29:45). The Qur'an refers to adultery or fornication as *zina* and to the adulterer as a *zani* (masc.) or *zaniya* (fem.) (Qur'an 17:32; 24:2, 3; 25:68; 60:12). The Qur'an is silent on other sexual infractions, including homosexuality (*liwata*), lesbianism (*sahq, sihaq*), bestiality, and masturbation (*istimna, nikah al-yad, jald ʿumayra*).

Another obvious and practical reason to contract marriage is to ensure the flourishing of the community through reproduction. In practical terms, most of the laws of marriage and divorce in Islam are primarily concerned with safeguarding the rights and well-being of children (Qur'an 4:2; 7:189; 16:72; 17:24). In addition, Qur'anic rulings support and protect female members of the community such as widows, divorcees, and orphans, who may, for one reason or another, no longer have access to family support.

TERMS FOR MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

Among Muslims, the most commonly used term for marriage is *nikah,* which literally means "sexual intercourse." As a legal term, *nikah* denotes the situation resulting from a contract entered into by a Muslim man and a Muslim woman, which legitimizes cohabitation and sexual intercourse between the signers of the contract in the eyes of God and their co-religionists. Among many contemporary Muslims, the term *nikah* has acquired religious significance, particularly for those living under secular governments where court registration of the marriage contract is mandatory. A civil registration or marriage license is perceived as a secular and legal obligation as opposed to *nikah,* which is a religious obligation. The verb

nakaha, "to marry," is used to denote either the man marrying the woman or the woman marrying the man.

Based on the Qur'anic term for a pair, *zawj,* each of the marriage partners is called *zawj* (fem. *zawja*), literally, "one of a pair" or "one of a couple." In Muslim countries where Arabic language and culture predominate, marriage is referred to as *zawaj,* literally, "pairing." More recently, the term *zawaj* has gained currency on cyberspace among non-Arabs as well. According to both tradition and Islamic law, a marriage is a public act, and thus it must be publicized. A feast or a celebration is usually held on such an occasion. The marriage celebration may be referred to as *'urs* (Arabic), *izdiwaj/'arusi* (Persian and Dari), *shaadi* (Urdu), or *dugun* (Turkish).

The Qur'an repeatedly cites the universe as evidence of God's existence and omnipotence. Naturally occurring pairs are an important part of the order of the universe: "He created the pair, male and female." (Qur'an 53:45). "We have created everything in pairs that you might reflect" (Qur'an 51:49). In accordance with God's command, Noah brought pairs of each species of animal onto the ark (Qur'an 11:49; 23:27). This universe of pairs extends to the human species as well: "Oh humankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13). "And God made [from a drop of sperm] the pair, the male and female" (Qur'an 75:39).

The Qur'an also notes a higher order of the male–female relationship beyond sexual fulfillment. The lasting consequences of marriage, the feelings of togetherness, companionship, love, tranquility, and peaceful and mutually supportive interdependence are underscored in several verses. "Among [God's] signs is that he created for you mates from yourselves so that you might find tranquility in them, and he put love and mercy between you. Therein are indeed signs for folk who reflect" (Qur'an 30:21). "[Women] are a garment for you and you are a garment for them. So lie down with them, and seek what God has prescribed for you" (Qur'an 2:187).

ELEMENTS OF THE ISLAMIC MARRIAGE CONTRACT

The Islamic marriage is founded on a contract that is rendered null and void when certain elements are absent. Shiite Muslims recognize two foundational elements to the marriage, Sunnis of the Hanafi and Maliki schools of jurisprudence recognize three elements, and Sunnis of the Shafi'i and Hanbali schools recognize four elements. All schools of Islamic thought agree that the first two elements of the marriage contract, namely, the Formula and Personal Status, are mandatory.

The Formula (Sigha)

A Muslim marriage is legalized by a contract (*'aqd*), which consists of a declaration (*ijab*) and an acceptance (*qubul*). The woman "declares" that she is entering into a marital relationship with the man, and he "accepts" her as his wife. Different law schools propose different terminology for both the declaration and the acceptance. However, all agree that both the declaration and the acceptance must be uttered in a single session. Except for the Hanbalis, none insist on the order in which the declaration and acceptance are uttered. If a person knows the Arabic language, he or she can pronounce the formula in Arabic, otherwise the person can use equivalent terms in his or her own language. A mute is permitted to use sign language.

Personal Status (Mahall)

The personal status of the man and the woman should be free from legal impediments to their marriage as specified by the particular law school that they follow. The Malikis also include freedom from physical defects that may be detrimental to the marriage. In addition, the specific identity of the persons contracting the marriage must be clearly stated. Generic statements, such as "One of my daughters or sons is marrying one of yours," uttered by the guardian are not acceptable. This nullifies the marriage contract.

Preferred Marriage Partners

Certain types of marriage partners are more preferred than others are, certain other types are strictly prohibited. For example, it is preferable for all Muslim men and women to marry their coreligionists. However, all of the Sunni legal schools agree that a man may marry a non-Muslim woman who is one of the "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*). This includes Jews, Christians, and Sabeans (a sect that most Muslims believe no longer exists). Zoroastrians, certain types of Hindus, and Buddhists are accepted by some Muslims as "People of the Book" as well, but this is a matter of dispute. Shiite law only permits a temporary (*mut'a*) marriage, not a permanent marriage between a Muslim man and a woman from the "People of the Book" (Ar. *kitabiyya*).

All schools of Islamic thought agree that a Muslim woman should not marry a man who is not "sufficient" (*kafi*) for her. The Shiites restrict the concept of sufficiency (*kafa'a*) to religion only; in other words, the man must be a Muslim. Thus, a Muslim woman is forbidden to marry a non-Muslim man until he becomes a Muslim by reciting the *Shahada*, the Islamic testimony of faith, before two witnesses. In addition to the requirement that the groom must be a Muslim, all four Sunni law schools require, to varying degrees, the

following factors as part of the determination of sufficiency: lineage, profession, free status (as opposed to slavery), piety, and property. In Sunni Islam, a woman may petition to divorce her husband if he cannot provide for his wife materially, in the way she was accustomed among her natal family.

Number of Marriage Partners

A Muslim woman is allowed to have only one husband at a time. However, the Qur'an specifies that a Muslim man may have as many as four wives at the same time, provided he could treat them equally. The Qur'an states: "If you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, then marry from among women such as you like, two, three, or four. But if you fear you will not be fair, then one only; that is the safest course" (Qur'an 4:3). However, another verse of the Qur'an raises strong doubts as to the ability of the husband to meet the condition of equal treatment: "You will never be able to do justice among women, no matter how much you desire to do so" (Qur'an 4:129). For this reason, some modern scholars such as Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) have concluded that, based on the dictates of the Qur'an, the established marital norm should be monogamy and not *polygyny,* in which a man has the right to marry more than one wife.

It seems that the Qur'anic permission to marry more than one woman may have been prompted by special historical circumstances in Medina at the time of the foundation of the first Islamic state. These circumstances may have included a surplus in the number of women with respect to men, the large number of widowed or separated wives because of battle losses and conversion to Islam from polytheism, and the unfair treatment of female wards by their guardians. One also imagines that for a man who physically "must" have more than one partner, polygyny safeguards his religion, his partner's piety, and the status of their children. Other circumstances may justify the practice of polygyny as well. For example, if the first wife is bedridden or disabled for life, she may accept a second wife into the household because she is physically unable to provide for her husband's needs. Furthermore, when one witnesses the frequency with which men of means leave their wives for younger women after the first wife has spent her youth establishing the family, one might imagine that polygyny is better than divorce. Instead of losing everything, including her social status, by being divorced by the husband, the first wife can look forward to the prospect of being maintained in her own home with dignity and can still claim her husband's attention half of the time.

Forbidden Marriages

Among the marriages that are forbidden in Islam, some are permanently forbidden and others are forbidden only temporarily. Marriages that are permanently forbidden are based primarily on rulings contained in verses 22–24

of *Surat al-Nisa'* (Sura 4, "The Women") of the Qur'an. Categories of people that Muslims are forbidden to marry under any circumstances are as follows:

1. Heathens and polytheists (Qur'an 2:221; 60:10)
2. Adulterers and fornicators
3. Close blood relatives
   a. Mother
   b. Stepmother
   c. Grandmothers of any generation
   d. Daughters and granddaughters of any generation
   e. Sisters (whether full, consanguine or uterine)
   f. Father's sisters (including paternal grandfather's sisters)
   g. Mother's sisters (including maternal grandmother's sisters)
   h. Brother's daughters
   i. Sister's daughters
   j. Son's wife
   k. Wife's mother
   l. Stepdaughter (The daughter by a former husband of a woman one has married if the marriage is consummated. However, if such a marriage was not consummated, there is no prohibition.)
4. "Milk" relatives (a foster relationship based on the sharing of breast milk)
   a. Foster mother
   b. Foster mother's sister
   c. Foster sister

Categories of persons for whom temporary marriage prohibitions apply include in-laws and former wives who are in various stages of divorce or separation. For example, a man cannot marry two sisters or an aunt and a niece at the same time. He may marry a sister or a niece, however, if the wife dies before her sister or if the aunt dies before her niece. When a woman's husband dies, she must not marry another husband until she has completed a waiting period (*'idda*) of four months and ten days. This rule is to ensure the paternity and inheritance rights of any child that might have been conceived before the husband's death.

When a man divorces his wife, he cannot remarry until after the *'idda* waiting period is completed. If he divorces his wife irrevocably, he cannot

marry her again unless she has first married another man, who also divorces her irrevocably after consummating the marriage. In such a case, the former husband would also have to wait until his former wife's *ʿidda* period has been completed. As in Western societies, a married woman cannot marry another man unless she obtains a divorce or unless her husband dies. In both cases, however, she must wait for the fulfillment of the *ʿidda* period before remarrying.

Besides the irrevocable divorce, a man's marriage to his wife is invalidated in a few other cases as well. One of these cases is called *ila'* (forswearing). In such a case, the husband takes an oath in God's name not to have a sexual relationship with his wife, either forever or for a period exceeding four months. If the husband does this, a judge (*qadi*) has the right to annul the marriage. In the case of *liʿan* (a repudiation or sworn accusation), the husband takes his wife before a judge and either accuses her of infidelity or denies being the father of their child. He must swear to this accusation four times in God's name. The wife may also swear in similar manner that she is innocent. After a *liʿan* divorce, both parties are ineligible to have any further sexual contact with each other. *Liʿan* divorces tend to occur when a husband suspects his wife of infidelity but cannot prove his claim objectively. Although the wife might suffer damage to her reputation in such a divorce, she is not considered guilty of infidelity and thus is not subject to the severe punishments that may be inflicted in a case of proven infidelity. Finally, in the first century of Islam, some women were repudiated by their husbands through a pre-Islamic practice known as *zihar*. In *zihar,* the husband forswears a sexual relationship with his wife by declaring her to be "like his mother" or like any other female relative that is forbidden to him. *Zihar* repudiations were forbidden in Islamic law and resulted in the annulment of the marriage.

Guardianship (Wilaya)

The schools of Islamic jurisprudence generally agree that a Muslim woman who has not previously been married needs a legal guardian (*wali*) to enter into a marriage. The regulations of guardianship also apply to boys who have not yet attained adulthood, and to mentally incompetent men. The guardian may be the father or the father's father (the position of the Hanafi, Shafiʿi, and Jaʿfari schools of jurisprudence). If the father is not present, the guardian may be an elder brother. The mother has no guardianship except in the Hanafi school, which allows her to conclude a marriage contract in the absence of the father. In addition, among the Hanafis, a woman of adult age may act in her own behalf. The legal schools disagree significantly as to the extent, nature, and duration of the guardian's authority. In the Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafiʿi schools, the approval of the guardian is one of the

conditions (*shart*) of concluding the marriage contract. Hence, in these three schools, if the girl or the woman is a virgin, she does not have the right to conclude a marriage contract without her guardian's participation irrespective of her age. This is justified on the ground that virgins lack experience with men and may be swayed by emotions in their decision to marry. She may act on her own behalf, however, if she has been married previously.

The other schools allow varying degrees of exception to the role of the guardian, and to the requirement of obtaining the consent of the female to be married, on the basis of her age and her virginity. In the Ja'fari and Hanafi schools, the guardian's permission is required only for a girl who has not yet attained adulthood, an incompetent or insane girl or woman, or a woman of advanced age. In both of these schools, a girl who has attained adulthood may marry whomever she wishes. However, the Hanafis give the guardian the right to annul the marriage contract of a young girl if, in his opinion, the condition of economic "sufficiency" (*kafa'a*) is not fulfilled. In Hanafi practice, a woman who has attained majority age can "marry down" in accordance with her own wishes. She may also petition a judge to act as her guardian and thus overrule the objection of her familial guardian if she deems such objections unfair. In actual practice, both the Hanafis and the Malikis have added cultural-based class and economic distinctions to the original piety-based articulation of the notion of "sufficiency." The Shiites, on the other hand, view a woman who has reached puberty, whether virgin or otherwise, as a full legal person coequal with her male counterpart. She is considered legally competent to make her own marriage decisions and even to conclude her own marriage contract, regardless of the father or guardian's approval, or of the social or economic status of the prospective spouse.

Witnesses (Shahid)

In Sunni Islam, a marriage contract is a public document. Thus, all Sunni schools require the presence of two male witnesses for the marital contract to be valid. The presence of one male and two females may also fulfill this requirement. The Shi'a do not require the presence of any witnesses as a condition of the marriage contract. Thus, a man and a woman may conclude a marital contract in private or in secret, if they wish to do so.

Bride Wealth (Mahr or *Sadaq)*

The *mahr* or *sadaq,* "dower," is an essential feature of the marriage contract. It is specified as a payment to the bride herself, and not to her father or guardian. The *mahr* is a gift of money or property that must be given by the prospective husband to legally validate the marriage. Theoretically, the

amount of *mahr* is to be negotiated between the bride and the groom. In practice, however, the guardian frequently negotiates the *mahr,* often without the bride's input or knowledge. Such practices usually occur because of lack of knowledge about the proper Shari'a rules or because of established cultural traditions. Although it is technically not permissible under Islamic law for the guardian to negotiate the dower, sanctions against this practice are seldom applied.

The *mahr* may be given all at once or it may be divided into two parts; one to be paid before consummating the marriage (*mahr al-muqaddam*) and the other stipulated for future payment in the event of divorce or death (*mahr al-mu'ajjal* or *mu'akhkhar*). The amount of the *mahr* is individually determined and is customarily commensurate with the economic and social standing of the bride's family. It is henceforth considered the sole property of the bride. This stipulation is not to be confused with the practice prevalent in some parts of the world, in Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike, whereby the bride's family demands the "bride price" as the price for the woman they are giving away. The *Mahr* would thus be more accurately understood as "bride wealth," which is theoretically intended to establish the woman's financial independence.

In contemporary times, the *mahr* has assumed a more significant role for Muslim women who, due to greater access to education, have come to a better understanding of the theoretical significance of this practice. Many women, devout and religiously nonobservant alike, have come to view the *mahr* as a sort of "divine protection" afforded to Muslim women centuries before secular laws offered financial protection to all women, particularly in the Western world. Undoubtedly, better educational levels have empowered many Muslim women to actively participate in the negotiation of the *mahr* amount. In addition, a better sense of individual rights has conferred upon them the power to negotiate, to their advantage, other conditions within the marriage contract. Islamic jurisprudence had always left these conditions open for negotiation in principle, except that only a few women could avail themselves of the practice because of their social, economic, and educational levels, or of their guardian's open-mindedness and willingness to negotiate to their advantage.

MUT'A MARRIAGE: A TEMPORARY MARRIAGE CONTRACT

This form of marriage practice is limited in Islamic jurisprudence to the Twelver Shiites, the *Ithna 'ashariyya,* who comprise the majority of the Shi'a in contemporary Islam. Other Shiite groups, such as the Ismailis, considered this practice illegal. *Mut'a* marriage is sometimes described as "marriage of limited duration" (*al-nikah al-muwaqqat*) or "discontinued marriage" (*al-nikah al-munqati'*). Most often, it is understood as "temporary marriage."

The Arabic dictionaries define the term *mutʿa* as "enjoyment, pleasure, delight." Thus, this marriage may also be understood as "marriage for the purpose of pleasure." Both Shiite and Sunni authorities agree upon the fact that this form of marriage was practiced in early Islam. However, they disagree as to the reasons why it was permitted. They also disagree about whether it was to be continued beyond a certain time and circumstance, or whether it was meant to be abolished when circumstances changed. The Sunnis believe that the permission to practice *mutʿa* marriage was eventually abrogated. However, the Twelver Shiʿa, based on reports from their early Imams, believe that it was to be continued.

Although it is not as widely practiced as the normal Muslim marriage, Twelver Shiite jurisprudential works discuss *mutʿa* marriage with the same care and detail that they do for a "permanent marriage." Thus, the foundational elements of this type of marriage are similar to those of any other marriage: both types of marriage rely on a prescribed formula for marriage, both share concern for the physical and psychological health of the individuals contracting the marriage, and both require the negotiation of *mahr,* "bride wealth." The most important difference between the *mutʿa* marriage and the normal Muslim marriage is that in a *mutʿa* marriage the duration (*mudda*) of the marriage must be specified in the marriage contract. There is no lower limit to the duration of a *mutʿa* marriage. However, the upper limit is 99 years. For this reason, the duration of the marriage must be stipulated so that there is no room for ambiguity. The stipulated duration must be strictly adhered to.

It is permissible to add other conditions to the *mutʿa* contract so long as they are legitimate, such as the stipulation of particular meeting times, the number of sexual acts, and the expected time of the consummation of the temporary marriage. By consensus of the jurists, however, divorce is not allowed in a *mutʿa* marriage. The two parties separate after the end of the stipulated period, once the other stipulations of the marriage contract have been fulfilled. There are no further rights or obligations on the part of either party beyond what is clearly specified in the contract. The *ʿidda,* "waiting period," before a woman can marry again is two menstrual cycles in a *mutʿa* marriage. This is shorter than the waiting period of three menstrual cycles (usually equivalent to three months) that is required after the dissolution of a normal marriage. If the wife is pregnant at the time of separation, her waiting period is extended to the time it takes for her to give birth or to the end of her *ʿidda* period, whichever is longer. In all cases, whether in a permanent marriage or in a temporary marriage, the waiting period is mandated in order to safeguard the legitimacy and rights of the child that may be born after the separation of the wife from the husband. The husband is obligated to provide for the child irrespective of the nature of the marriage.

Within the rules of *mutʿa* marriage, certain types of women are recommended for marriage, others are forbidden for a man to marry, and still

others are considered reprehensible for the man contracting the temporary marriage. Some of these rules are as follows:

a. It is preferable to contract a *mut'a* marriage with a free and chaste Muslim woman.

b. It is permissible to contract a *mut'a* marriage with women from among the "People of the Book," but one may not contract such a marriage with a polytheist or with an enemy of the Household of the Prophet.[1]

c. A man may not contract a *mut'a* marriage with the daughter of his permanent wife's sister or brother without his permanent wife's permission.

d. A man may not contract a *mut'a* marriage with another person's slave without her master's permission and without his own permanent wife's permission.

e. It is reprehensible, but not forbidden, to contract a *mut'a* marriage with a woman of loose morals. If a man were to contract a temporary marriage with such a woman, it is his duty to command her not to have a sexual relationship with any other person during the stipulated time of their marriage.

f. It is reprehensible to contract a *mut'a* marriage with a virgin. This would cause hardship to her family because it would make her less desirable for a permanent marriage. If a temporary marriage contract were somehow concluded with a virgin, the man is not permitted to consummate the marriage without her father's permission. Such a condition is almost impossible to imagine in most Muslim societies.

The agreement between Shiite and Sunni authorities concerning the practice of *mut'a* marriage during the Prophet's lifetime confirms the original sanction of this practice. Both groups agree that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam (r. 634–644 CE), ordered the practice to be discontinued. This confirms that the practice was continued after the Prophet Muhammad's death, at least through the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (r. 632–634 CE). The ensuing debate between Sunnis and Shiites about whether 'Umar had the authority to discontinue the practice of *mut'a*—and whether or not the Shiite Imams allowed the practice to continue—underscores the fact that, early on in Islamic history, there was a pliability of attitude with regard to the continuity or abrogation of certain practices in Islam.

MARRIAGE IN THE LAWS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM COUNTRIES

The intrinsic capacity for evolution within Islamic law is illustrated by the contemporary efforts undertaken by Muslim states to revisit family law and enact legislation accommodating contemporary sensibilities. Most present-day Muslim countries have codified their family laws primarily on the basis

of a particular school of Islamic jurisprudence, to which a majority of their population adheres. Sometimes, however, the laws of a particular country combine the jurisprudence of one school with that of other schools. Such combinations, when consistent and properly reasoned, are justified because of the Prophet Muhammad's famous statement that difference of opinion among his community is a source of divine mercy. The Qur'anic verse emphasizing that Islam is a religion of ease, not of complications and difficulties, further strengthens the approach of combining codes from different schools. The North African country of Tunisia leads the way among the Muslim nations that have enacted the most far-reaching reforms in family law. The Tunisian Code of Personal Status, enacted in 1956, not only provides for a minimum age of marriage for women (now 17), but has also abolished polygyny and has abrogated the right of a guardian to contract a marriage without the woman's consent. In effect, Tunisia, whose legal culture is based on Maliki jurisprudence, has abandoned the Maliki notion of guardianship altogether, at least as it pertains to marriage. The same is true of the requirement for ''sufficiency'' or ''suitability'' (*kafa'a*).

The Personal Status Code of Syria (1953) modifies the position of Hanafi jurisprudence by limiting the guardian's powers over the marriage of a daughter who has reached majority. The Moroccan Personal Status Code (1957) departs from the basic Maliki position by prohibiting the guardian from forcing marriage on a virgin ward who has attained majority. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states continue to follow an uncodified system of family law. According to this system, individual cases do not constitute binding precedent since the system relies on the independent juridical reasoning and application (*ijtihad*) of the judge. Thus, it is possible that different judgments will be rendered in similar cases. Some countries such as Syria, Jordan, and Morocco have attempted to control marriage contracts between very young girls and much older men by setting limits on the age difference between the spouses. For example, in Jordan an 18-year-old woman cannot be married to someone more than 20 years her senior. However, in rural areas, lack of accurate documentation registering the birth of either party may invalidate the positive effects of such legislation.

All traditional schools of law interpret the Qur'an as permitting polygyny as long as certain conditions of fairness are observed. As noted earlier, the Tunisian Code explicitly prohibits polygyny. However, even within a traditional framework, mechanisms exist to enable a woman to prevent or limit her prospective spouse from contracting multiple marriages. For example, in some schools of Islamic law, a woman may stipulate in her marriage contract that her husband may not take a second wife. However, the Shafi'i and Shiite schools of law reject this provision on the basis that a contract may not forbid what is allowed in the Qur'an. Turkey remains the major

exception among Muslim nations in that it abolished Muslim Family Law altogether. In 1926, the family law aspects of traditional jurisprudence were replaced by the Swiss Civil Code, which remains to this day the basis of Turkish Civil Law.

A number of contemporary scholars of Islam have contended that in actual practice, modern legislation regarding marriage and divorce has contributed very little to alleviating gender inequalities in Muslim societies. Rather than modifying the Shari'a, in many cases modern legislation tends instead to codify it. For example, the requirement of court documentation for divorce cases assures the wife's right to be informed about her husband's petition for a divorce. In the past, in accordance with some interpretations of the law, she might not have been aware that her husband had divorced her. However, the mere fact of documentation does not restrict a husband's right to divorce his wife without grounds. In addition, it is possible that in the process of codifying Shari'a laws, modern legislation might also codify and strengthen traditional cultural attitudes that affirm men's power over women and provide additional justification for perpetuating unfair gender practices. For example, if it is assumed, according to traditional norms, that women must make themselves available to their husbands at all times, then working women, simply by pursuing a career or working because of economic necessity, may provide grounds for divorce. Even worse, their supposed economic independence, even if paid a low salary, may render them ineligible for maintenance during marriage or ineligible for child support after divorce.

Even though all Sunni legal schools continue to uphold the guardian's powers in contracting the marriage of a female ward, the realities of modern life have begun to supersede the traditional practice of arranged marriages in Muslim countries. Men and women now meet and choose each other through personal contact in universities, in the workplace, through mutual friends, or even on the Internet. Furthermore, modern legislation in most Muslim countries now forbids compulsion in marriage. This is not to say that parental guidance in the choice of a spouse will disappear completely. On the contrary, professional and well-educated Muslims continue to allow their parents to arrange marriages for them. Certain cultural norms persist, although these too are subject to modification. For example, a Lebanese friend of mine, when discussing contemporary marriage practices among Lebanese Muslims, noted that parents sometimes ignore the requirement of "sufficiency" or "suitability." Instead of having their daughters marry men of equal or higher social status, they prefer their daughters to marry "one notch down," as this supposedly guarantees the wife an upper hand in the marriage. Perhaps this practice came about to counter centuries of unfair gender-related practices. In any case, this example demonstrates that in Islam, as in other religious traditions, principles or practices that are supposedly required by the Law can be modified to suit the reality on the ground.

THE PERSONAL VOICE: GROWING UP IN A POLYGYNOUS HOUSEHOLD

I grew up within a polygynous household in India. My father's first wife was unable to have children beyond the first two daughters because of a permanent injury during her second childbirth. It was her deepest wish to "give" her husband a male offspring; this is a highly desirous goal in South Asian culture, irrespective of one's religious persuasion. My father's first wife blamed herself for bringing to an end any prospect for further continuation of my father's genealogical line. She found this an unbearable prospect and insisted that her husband remarry to give himself a chance to father a son.

Based on her personal testimony, which she often used to narrate to all of my siblings including myself, my father refused to consider her suggestion and never held her responsible for their situation. He was surprised that she would even suggest he remarry because that might endanger her own personal status vis-à-vis a second wife, who would rise in esteem were she to "produce" a son. An even more important hurdle was that, being Nizari Ismailis, my father and his first wife were governed by the rules related to marriage and divorce enjoined by the Ismaili Constitution, which the Imam of their time, Sir Sultan Mohammed Shah, Aga Khan III, had promulgated.[2] According to the Ismaili Constitution's interpretation of Muslim Family Law, monogamy was to be the norm practiced by all Ismailis irrespective of their economic or communal standing. However, there were exceptions to this rule that took into consideration issues such as the infertility of the wife. In such a case, an Ismaili man would have to petition the relevant Ismaili social institution for permission to marry a second wife and seek formal permission to do so from his first wife. In my father's case, this exception clearly did not apply; his first wife had already "produced" two daughters, so infertility was not a factor.

My father tried to mollify his first wife by reminding her that he could not justify a second wife under Ismaili rules. She was not about to give up, however. Despite the fact that she was illiterate and that her official signature was her thumb impression, she appeared before the entire Ismaili Council (a 20-member body) and appealed "her case"—not her husband's—for a second wife. She asserted that if she gave her husband permission to have a second wife, and if this were her honest desire, the Council was obligated to grant her husband permission to remarry. The Council members, considering her interests, reminded my father's first wife that she may have been acting emotionally at the time and that she may later regret her decision. She remained adamant, however, and assured the Council that even if her husband were to abandon her, she would never petition the Council again. Eventually, the Council allowed my father to have a second wife, but only after requiring him to set aside a substantial portion of his wealth for his first wife.

As it turned out, these assets assured her financial independence after my father's death.

My biological mother was much younger than both my father and his first wife. She was a very young widow from rural Gujarat whose first husband had died very young within months into their marriage, having contracted some fatal disease. She was chosen as a bride by my father's first wife, who went out of her way to convince my mother and her family that she would never treat her as "the other woman" but rather as a daughter. In any case, it would have been difficult for the young widow to find another husband of my father's standing in that region. They got married and she moved to Mumbai with my father. My father's household now consisted of both wives living under the same roof with the younger of his two daughters from the first marriage. Although such an arrangement is not unique, it is not a typical situation either, because Islamic law requires separate quarters for each wife. My father's eldest daughter, who was in fact older than his second wife, was already married at the time. She became pregnant a couple of months before my father's second wife, so my father became a grandfather and a father almost at the same time.

It must have been because of the first wife's deep prayers and intense wishes that the first child from the second wife turned out to be a boy—the only boy among five children that were born to my mother. The rest of us turned out to be girls! I was the second-to-last child to be born. My younger sister was born seven months after my father died. My mother was two months pregnant at the time of my father's sudden death from kidney and heart failure. We grew up calling my father's first wife *Maji*, a term generally used for a grandparent or an elderly person. She was *Maji* and our biological mother was *Mummy*. To this day, I find it incredible that the two wives shared their husband, living under the same roof, for approximately nine years! If that were not baffling enough, they both continued to live together for 30 years after my father's death, with the younger wife, my *Mummy*, passing away at age 60 in 1992, followed by my *Maji* passing away at age 91 in 1993.

After my father's death, my biological mother, my *Mummy*, attended to my father's business every day, despite the fact that she was from one of the smallest villages in Gujarat and had less than a fourth-grade education. She was motivated by the desire to secure her children's well-being by protecting their inheritance and source of livelihood from being gobbled up by family members and friends. Her other personal *jihad* (struggle for a good cause) was to ensure that her children got a decent education. On his accession to the Imamate in 1957, the Nizari Ismaili Imam, Aga Khan IV, made it clear to his community that he wished to continue the policy of the previous Imam by insisting on the education of all young Ismailis, especially girls. The previous Imam, his grandfather, had been unequivocal about the necessity for educating girls and stated, "Educate all your children well. However, if you

have a son and a daughter but have the financial capacity to educate only one child, choose your daughter.'' The new Imam now wished that parents would doubly commit themselves to providing a high-quality education for their children. Thus, my mother fought hard to enroll us in the best schools, although she occasionally fell prey to scammers who would promise admission for a child in a nearby Catholic school for a certain amount of money. Once they received the money from her, they were never seen again.

As I look back on my early life, I now realize that my two mothers instinctively divided the task of raising their children. My *Mummy* went to work, struggled, and fought in the outside world, while my *Maji* stayed at home feeding us and spoiling us with the attention that my *Mummy* did not have time to give us. Was life always stress free and did all things go smoothly? Probably not, for I am sure that there were strong undercurrents of emotion and power struggles between the two women when their husband was alive, and even during the three decades they spent together without him. However, both women chose to continue living together and become a source of support for each other. The younger wife always addressed the older wife respectfully as *Ben,* ''sister.'' For us children, the main inconvenience was being brought up in a home that could most aptly be described as a perpetual ''open house.'' Relatives from rural and urban areas of India sent their daughters to marry under my *Mummy's* watchful eye. There were other relatives too; those living in the Ismaili diasporas of Malaysia, Burma, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, regularly descended upon us to ensure that their children ''kept in touch with their roots,'' continued to speak an Indian language, and married within the culture and the faith.

Growing up in that household, neither the children of the first wife nor the children of the second wife considered themselves as two separate families. I remember two distinct incidents in my life that demonstrate how deeply etched this reality was in my mind. Years later when I settled in Canada, I tried to bring both of my mothers and my half sister from India to live with me. The Canadian Immigration Board made it categorically clear to me that I could sponsor only my ''biological'' mother and my half sister, who were related to me by blood, but not my *Maji*. I was upset that they did not understand our family dynamics, that *Maji* was also my mother, and that it was inconceivable that she would have to stay behind on her own. In the end, I was forced to drop the whole idea. Another time, when I suffered from droopy eyelid syndrome, my first response to the doctor trying to determine whether my genetic background had caused this condition was to say, ''Well, my Mum developed this condition in her seventies.'' Then I stopped myself in my tracks. This was *Maji,* who could not have transmitted this condition to me because she was not my biological mother!

My objective in sharing these deeply personal experiences with the reader is not to condone, let alone glorify, polygyny in any way. As a Muslim woman, even having grown up in a polygynous household with largely positive

experiences, I would still find it intolerable for my spouse to consider having a second wife, even if we were living in a country that permitted polygyny. However, I think it is important to share the variety of possible experiences and dynamics that are often subsumed under the generally negative preconceptions of polygynous marriages in the West. While understanding the potential for abuse in polygynous marriages, I have also come to appreciate that multiple factors may lead to unconventional relationships or households and that such factors need to be studied in detail. Polygynous marriages should not be dismissed as mere oddities that are prevalent in ''other'' societies and cultures, while ''our'' society is considered completely free from such practices. The polygynous relationships among Mormon Fundamentalists who adhere to what is called ''The Principle''—as depicted in the currently popular U.S. television mini-series *Big Love*—prove that experiences like mine are far from unknown in the West, even in the United States.

NOTES

1. An ''enemy of the Household of the Prophet'' would today only include those few extremist Sunni Muslims who consider Shiite Muslims to be unbelievers or heretics. In the past, this term was used to designate supporters of the Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs, who denied the claim of the family of ʻAli and Fatima to the leadership of Islam.

2. Ismailis are adherents of a branch of the Shiite Islam that considers Ismaʻil, the eldest son of the Shiite Imam Jaʻfar al-Sadiq (d. 765 CE), as the latter's successor. Doctrinally, they follow the guidance of a living guide, an Imam, who governs the Ismaili community by interpreting the sources of Islamic Law and applying them to his community's contemporary situation. The present Imam of the Nizari Ismailis is Karim Aga Khan, who claims direct descent from the Prophet and is the 49th in line of succession from Prophet Muhammad, through his daughter Fatima and cousin and son-in-law 'Ali.

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4

The Spiritual Significance of Marriage in Islam

Jane Fatima Casewit

INTRODUCTION: AN EGYPTIAN SCENARIO

Like many Egyptian couples, Wafa and Ali married relatively late in life. This is because the acute housing shortage in Cairo and rampant inflation renders material life very difficult for most Cairenes. Despite these setbacks, Wafa and Ali married, placed their trust in God for their future, and lived contentedly for many years in a very small flat in a poor, crowded neighborhood. As the years passed, it became clear that Wafa would not be able to bear children. Although, as pious Muslims, they submitted to this situation as God's will, both Wafa and Ali felt emptiness in their lives without children and the joys they bring.

After much prayer and consultation, they both agreed that Ali should take a second wife, so that there would eventually be children in the family. No longer a young man, Ali sought the advice of his relatives and neighbors. One neighbor had a daughter, Aziza, about 17 years old, who was beautiful but deaf from birth. Realizing that it would not be easy to find a husband for a deaf girl, and that it is not easy to find a wife for a man getting on in years, Wafa and Ali decided that Ali should marry Aziza. If she consented to this arrangement, it would suit all concerned, as well as being a charitable act.

The marriage took place and Wafa continued her job as an assistant in a local nursery school. Aziza initially took over most of the household tasks. After retiring from her job at the nursery school, Wafa became a sort of "older sister" to Aziza, looking after her and helping her to communicate with the outside world. The family anxiously looks forward to the arrival of Aziza's baby, especially Wafa, who always wanted a child of her own. As Wafa grows older and her health declines, Aziza will undoubtedly look after Wafa, showing the same trust and care as Wafa did for Aziza.

Should the above scenario be seen as a norm or as an exception? How can such polygynous marriages (marriages in which a man can have more than one wife) "work" for everyone concerned? Why would most Western couples and many modern Muslims be unable to accept such an arrangement? In attempting to approach these questions, this chapter outlines the spiritual significance of the institution of marriage in Islam. It examines its underlying, deeper significance by addressing the Muslim concept of marriage through the lenses of symbolism and metaphysics, as well the positive effect of stable marriages on society as a whole. The broader, general responsibilities and rights of both wife and husband are highlighted according to the rules of Islamic jurisprudence. The virtues necessary for sustaining a long-term relationship and the possibilities of extending the marital bonds to three persons are also examined. This chapter is not an analysis of current social ills in the Muslim world, nor do I intend to apologize for abuses committed in Muslim societies. Instead, I hope to present the fundamental spiritual principles upon which Islamic marriage is based.

In all civilizations, marriage celebrates and regulates the intricate relationship between husband and wife and the resulting procreation of children. The uniting of male and female in a conjugal bond is one of the most sacred and important institutions in all world cultures. The institution of marriage is granted the utmost importance in all religious traditions and societies, although the emphasis on its various aspects differs from one civilization to another. Both male and female reflect qualities of the Divine, and the most profound significance of the union of a man and a woman is that marriage mirrors the union of the human soul with the Divine spirit. This union of the soul with God is the highest human aspiration.

Yet, despite the deep spiritual implications of marriage, never before has this institution come under such a grave threat as it is undergoing today. People around the world are suffering the devastating effects of broken families on children and on society. In the Muslim world, in the wake of the dissolution of the extended family under the pressures of modernity, divorce and domestic violence within the nuclear family are on a sharp rise. Although the social tensions characterized by broken homes, juvenile delinquency, single motherhood, and homosexuality have not yet penetrated Islamic societies as pervasively as they have in the West, the recent necessity for revised family codes in many Muslim countries to prevent injustices toward women and children is a sign that something has gone terribly wrong.

THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE OF DUALITY

The divine archetype of marriage is present in all of creation. As with all divine revelations, Islam places marriage beyond the human realm because it is created and willed by God. The divine concept of archetypal pairs is

explicit in the Qur'an. It is parallel to the doctrine of *Yin* and *Yang* in the Chinese tradition, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* in Hinduism, and the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary in Christianity. Reference to the divine concept of duality can also be found in the Hebrew Bible: "All things are double, one against another, and He hath made nothing defective. He hath established the good things of every one. And who shall be filled with beholding His glory?" (*Ecclesiasticus,* 62:25–26).

In Islam, the Creator is one. However, His creation begins with multiplicity and multiplicity necessarily originates with two, a duality. Like the Bible, the Qur'an frequently refers to the existence of pairs (*zawjayn*) in creation: "And of everything [God] created a pair" (Qur'an 51:49). Although the Qur'an continually reiterates the miracle of the pairs as a basis for creation, the essential message of Islam, considered as the final revelation in this cycle of humanity, reaffirms the Oneness of God. The Qur'an, believed by Muslims to be the direct word of God, is itself a miraculous reflection of Divine Unity (*tawhid*). The sacred text of the Qur'an is woven into a miraculous tapestry that threads together the Divine message but continually draws us back to the central doctrine of unity.

One of the most important threads of this Divine text refers repeatedly to the totality of the universe as it appears to us from the human vantage point. From the human perspective, the universe consists of the Earth and the Heavens. The phrase "the Heavens and the Earth" (*al-samawat wa al-ard*) occurs over 200 times in the Qur'an. This cosmic pair was the first "pair" in creation, and the Qur'an alludes to the Divine archetype of duality through reference to this primordial pair. The Heavens and the Earth refer to the whole of the universe and beyond. The phrase that often follows this in the Qur'an is *wa ma baynahuma,* which means "and that which is between them"—in other words, all of the rest of creation. The Qur'an's description of God's creation of the Heavens and the Earth recalls the creative act that brings duality into existence from unity and establishes the "pairs" as the fundamental components of existence. Moreover, the Qur'an also teaches us that the Heavens and the Earth existed together in an undifferentiated state before creation: "Do those who disbelieve know that the Heavens and the Earth were of one piece; then We parted them, and We made every living thing of water? Will they not then believe?" (Qur'an 21:30).

The first great pair of Heaven and Earth is miraculously repeated at every level of creation: in animals and plants, the sun and the moon, gold and silver, and lightness and darkness. It is even affirmed in the conceptual categories that we use: in affirmation and negation, motion and rest, cause and effect, and origin and return. The story of the Prophet Noah, which is recounted in the Qur'an much as it is in the Bible, is not only an account of the great flood that covered the earth but also a symbol of Divine duality: "Embark therein, of each kind two, male and female" (Qur'an 11:40).

As a corollary of the spiritual principle of duality, the Islamic concepts of the "Pen" and the "Tablet" also act as symbols of the twin poles of manifestation and creation or Divine Intellect and All-Possibility. Although the Qur'an mentions both Pen and Tablet in several verses, the Hadith literature provides more information about how these verses are to be understood. According to Hadith accounts, the Pen "wrote" the destinies of all humankind onto the Tablet at the dawn of creation. The word for "Pen" in Arabic (*qalam*) is masculine in gender. The word for "Tablet," (*lawh*), however, may be either masculine or feminine. In a famous verse, the Qur'an states that as the uncreated Word of God, the Qur'an is on a "Guarded Tablet" (*fi lawhin mahfuzin*) (Qur'an 85:22). In this cosmic, archetypal sense, the Tablet is a masculine concept. However, *lawha,* the actual tablet that children write on in Qur'anic schools, is a feminine word. Thus, if the concepts of Pen and Tablet are understood to represent manifestation and creation, they can also be seen to symbolize both the divine concept of pairs and the pair of male and female. As symbols, the concepts of Pen and Tablet also correlate with the concepts of Intellect and Soul, which are similarly masculine and feminine. Intellect (*ʿaql*) in Arabic is masculine, whereas Soul (*nafs*) is feminine. Both examples, Pen and Tablet and Intellect and Soul, illustrate how, in the religious language of Islam, divine duality pervades space, time, and language alike.

Divine duality exists on the human level as well. The Qur'an explains that God created human beings from one soul, a reflection of how the duality of male and female proceeds from the unity and oneness of God. The separation of the macrocosm into Heaven and Earth and the creation of the Pen and the Tablet have their equivalence in the creation of two souls from a single soul. These two souls, derived from the primordial single soul, became the first human pair, Adam and Eve: "Fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul; from her/it, He created her/its mate, and sent forth from the two of them many men and women" (Qur'an 4:1).[1] Femininity and masculinity thus pervade the created universe and correspond to the primordial duality at the origin of creation. The "pairs" (*zawjayn*) at every level of creation are part of the divine plan. Divine duality also exists within every human being; that is, at the level of the microcosm, which metaphysically mirrors the macrocosm.

Thus, by examining the metaphysical and spiritual significance of marriage, it becomes easier to understand why Islam and the other great religious traditions consider marriage a divine institution, a "gift" from God. For the believer, whether Muslim or the follower of another faith, the commitment of marriage is first a pact with God and second a pact with one's spouse. Each marriage is thus part of the divine scheme of the universe. The divine aspect of marriage is also present at the physical level, as sexual union can be seen as a desire for wholeness, a symbol of union with God, and a foretaste of the bliss of Paradise. In a way, the joy felt in sexual union constitutes a sensual "glimpse" of Paradise. It is because of this divine aspect of sexuality that

Islam, like other religions, strictly regulates male and female relationships. It is also the reason why a full understanding of sexuality cannot be gained outside of the framework of tradition and sacred laws.

ISLAMIC MARRIAGE AS A SANCTIFIED CONTRACT

Unlike Christianity, which treats marriage as a sacrament, marriage in Islam is a contract, a legal commitment written up as such, sanctioned by God and acknowledged by society. It is a contractual agreement between two parties: the husband and the wife. Under this contract, each party agrees to fulfill certain duties in return for certain rights and privileges. The written contract is signed by both of the spouses, and the marriage agreement is made public to the wider community through festivities, the customs of which vary across the Islamic world. These festivities confirm that the couple has come together through a sanctified agreement in conformity with Islamic law. The Islamic bonds of marriage not only sanctify human sexuality and reproduction but also provide for companionship and mutual support. The stereotypical Western view of a Muslim marriage as a secluded harem of dark-eyed beauties that is ruled by a dominating and sexually insatiable male needs to be reassessed in the light of the God-given legislation based on the metaphysical principles sketched above. The socioeconomic situation of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Islamic revelation also needs to be taken into consideration.

Before God, all women and men in Islam are *nas* (singular *insan*), human beings. All human beings, whether they are males or females, are at once both slave (*ʿabd*) and vice-regent (*khalifa*) of God on Earth. Women and men are spiritual equals in Islam and are addressed as such in the Qur'an. Therefore, one of the underlying premises of marriage in Islam is the primacy of the individual human being before God. Within the context of a marriage, a man and a woman serve each other and their children as well as serve God, thereby extending their responsibilities as slaves of God and His vice-regent. As Lamya Farouki has pointed out, "Instead of holding the personal goals of the individual supreme, Islam instills in the adherent a sense of his or her place within the family and of a responsibility to that group."[2] For a Muslim, the ultimate goal of the individual is to please God. Besides the prescribed rites and virtues encouraged by the religion, the social obligations of both men and women are very explicit in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Sunna. One way of pleasing God is by carrying out marital and family duties. According to Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, "Moral restraint (imposed by marriage in Islam) is not an encroachment on human freedom, but a reasonable sacrifice for the sake of human dignity and in the interest of society and for the pleasure of God."[3]

At the social level, a major goal of marriage in Islam was to establish fairness and equilibrium in what was arguably a disordered society in the Arabian

Peninsula during the period before the Islamic revelation. This period is commonly known as the *Jahiliyya,* the "Time of Ignorance," in Arabic. Rules for marriage and norms of sexuality revealed by God through the Qur'an provided the needed protection for women, especially widows and orphans. However, it must not be surmised that the rules of Islamic marriage were only for pre-Islamic Arabia. Despite abuses of the system, the time-honored models of Muslim marriage and the family have existed successfully for centuries.

Islam brought a new social order to the Arabian Peninsula and ultimately to the entire sector of humanity for which it was destined. Islam, God's final revelation to humanity, elevated the status of woman as equal with man before God. The Qur'an granted women new rights and responsibilities in the social domain and repeatedly commanded men to treat all women, even divorcees, with kindness. Men were given new rights as well, but they were also given new responsibilities toward women. One of the final pronouncements of the Prophet Muhammed before his death was, "Take care of your women." Throughout his life, the Prophet was a model of kindness and justice toward the women who were entrusted to him. His general rule for the behavior of husbands is summed up in another famous hadith: "The best of you is he who treats his wife in the best way."

Because of the spiritual significance of marriage and the necessity for stable families and societies, volumes have been written by Muslim jurists on the rights and responsibilities of marriage. In the Muslim world, the laws, rights, and responsibilities of marriage and divorce have caused much debate in works of Islamic jurisprudence. The topic continues to be addressed by modern Muslims, who find themselves caught up in societies in transition, between traditional Islamic values and Western cultural patterns. However, the rise of the incidence of divorce in Muslim societies and the urgency to revise personal status codes in Muslim countries show that many Muslims have lost the understanding of the deeper significance of marriage in Islam and no longer have the same commitment to marriage as those who lived in previous generations. This neglect of the marriage contract is often paralleled by a similar neglect of the "contract" that human beings have with God.

MARRIAGE AS AN ABODE OF PEACE

When asked what had prompted him to enter Islam, one young American Muslim that I know said he was struck by the happiness of middle-aged Muslim couples he had met and the peace and tranquility that characterized their lives. On the level of human relations, the ideal Islamic marriage should provide a sense of inner and outer peace—peace within the home and peace within the individuals who inhabit the home. Our relationship with our Creator has a direct influence on our relationships with our spouses and our

families. True happiness can only be found in God. When this is understood, relationships with spouses are understood from a higher and more all-encompassing perspective and are thereby liable to be smoother and more tranquil.

In Arabic, one of the words for "home" is *maskan*. Literally, a *maskan* is a "residence" or a "dwelling." This concept is related to the important Qur'anic term, *sakina,* which comes from the same Arabic root as *maskan*. The Arabic root *sakana* means "to dwell" or "to become quiet," thus giving *sakina* the sense of "an indwelling presence that provides stillness or peace." The Hebrew term *shekhinah* also carries a similar meaning. Thus, a *maskan,* a home, is meant to be an abode of peace and tranquility, a refuge from the tumult of the outside world. How can the home become an abode of peace? It can become such only if the relationships within the home are harmonious. The primary relationship in a household, upon which all other relationships are built, is the intricate relationship between husband and wife. This relationship can only be successful if both parties realize that marriage and the creation of a family are "signs" and gifts from God and if they respect this privilege by treating each other with respect and selfless service. As the Qur'an makes clear, recognition of the spiritual significance of marriage is crucial to the success of the relationship between husband and wife: "One of His signs is that He created for you, from among yourselves, spouses (*azwajan*) that you may find peace in them (*li-taskunu ilayha*). Then He ordained that you treat them with affection (*mawadda*) and mercy (*rahma*). Verily in this are signs for a people who reflect" (Qur'an 30:21).

If a home is meant to provide an abode of peace for those dwelling in it, such peace can only be created by a family, headed by a couple committed to the long-term stability of the marital relationship. Through this commitment, the couple take it upon themselves to surrender some of their desires and personal freedoms for the greater good of the family. A Muslim home permeated by the sacred presence of *sakina* is dwelt in by a couple, their family, and sometimes an extended family. The couple strive to place their responsibilities toward each other and their children ahead of their own interests for the benefit of all who live in the home.

Sakina is also produced by love and mercy, which should be continually refreshed in a relationship, particularly with one's spouse. The self-sacrifice of love is manifested through mercy toward one's spouse and one's children. The mutual sharing of love and mercy produces *sakina*—peace and tranquility—within the family. The ever-increasing strife and conflicts in today's world mirror the state of unhappy households. In both dysfunctional societies and dysfunctional families, individuals put their personal interests before those of others and thus cannot live harmoniously. Dysfunctional families also reflect the discord, unhappiness, and disequilibrium of individual souls. A soul's ultimate happiness and well-being are dependent upon its relationship with God. Worldly pleasures and success can provide

temporary happiness, but if our relationship with our Creator is not in order, we will never find true contentment or peace nor will our relationships with others be easy.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN ISLAMIC MARRIAGE

In Islamic jurisprudence, the laws pertaining to marriage are based on what promotes the greater good for the couple, the family, and the society as a whole. One of the things not normally understood in the West about Islamic marriage is that women have at least as many rights as men in a marriage. This is because it is understood that a woman's primary obligations to society are the all-consuming task of bringing up her children and creating an honorable lineage—young adults who are spiritually, physically, emotionally, and intellectually beneficial to themselves and to society.

Children require approximately 12 years of appropriate care, education, and supervision to assure their spiritual, moral, and educational development. The care and nurturing of a child is, in principle, a full-time occupation for the first 10–12 years of the child's life. In order to carry out these duties to the best of her ability, a mother needs the assurance of complete economic support and maintenance so that she can focus on this most important function. This is why man is required to bear the financial burden of maintaining the family in Islam. In addition, man also has a responsibility to protect both woman and children because of their being physically weaker than man is. In return, a woman protects and maintains the *maskan,* the household or abode of peace, in which her husband and children can find refuge from the pressures of the outside world. In a Muslim marriage, the husband is responsible for the outward aspects of existence—job, income, support, and protection—whereas the wife is responsible for the inward aspects of existence—the home and the good of those who dwell in it.

The primary source of Islamic regulations for the rights and responsibilities pertaining to marriage is the Qur'an, but their details are worked out through the Sunna and the opinions of legal scholars. However, the Qur'an is not vague in its prescriptions for a good and moral family life. It is quite specific about how men should treat women and vice versa, the rights of wives and divorcees, the rights of small babies and young children, and the treatment of orphans. In addition, the laws of inheritance are spelt out very clearly in the Qur'an, leaving little doubt about their application.

At the time of her marriage, a bride has the right to a dower (*mahr*), which in principle is a financial guarantee for her in case of divorce. Throughout the marriage, and even for specific periods after a divorce, a woman has the right to complete economic maintenance by her husband.

Islamic law insists that a woman should not be preoccupied by economic concerns so that she can devote all of her time and energy to nurturing, educating, and bringing up her children. Well brought up, God-fearing children who are able to take charge of their own lives and souls are the greatest legacies a human being can leave in this world. In order to carry out this important goal, Islamic law puts the responsibility of financial maintenance on the man so that the woman can devote herself to preparing her children to be responsible Muslims and constructive members of society. In fact, a man may find himself responsible for more females than just his wife, including his unwed sisters, his mother, or his aunts. Although most Muslim jurists agree that women have the right to work outside of the home or operate their own businesses, they are not required to contribute their income to the family coffers. In addition, some schools of Islamic law agree that a wife should be maintained under the economic conditions that she was used to in her own family.

Turning to the rights of men in marriage, the Prophet's cousin Ibn ʻAbbas (d. 687 CE) reported that the primary right of a man in marriage is sexual access to his wife. Although this may seem "chauvinistic" to modern thinking, in an Islamic marriage a man has the right—within reason and normal expectations—to have a sexual relationship with his wife whenever he desires her, except during the times of a woman's menses, illness, fasting, or other inconvenient moments. Of course, a woman's privacy should not be abused. The purpose behind this right is to prevent adultery by ensuring sexual satisfaction. However, it must be pointed out that women also have a right in Muslim marriages to seek sexual satisfaction on a regular basis. Some schools of law state that impotence or lack of sexual performance on the part of the husband can become grounds for divorce.

Another right of men that is specified in Islamic jurisprudence is the right to maintain one's lineage, which means the right of the man to give to his offspring his family name. In Islam, an orphan keeps the original family name of her father and cannot take the name of the family who raises her, even if she would want to. Similarly, a Muslim wife keeps her father's name, thus preserving her own family lineage. Muslim women normally do not take their husband's family name. In most Muslim societies, a person's family name and lineage are important aspects of identity. To lose these is, in a sense, to lose oneself. The right to lineage is also a reason why fornication and adultery are forbidden in Islam. Not only do sexual relations outside of marriage break the bonds of trust between husband and wife, but also sexual relations before marriage, especially on the part of women, carry the danger of producing children who will suffer throughout their lives because they have no established lineage, and hence no clear family identity. In most local cultures of the Muslim world, such children are for all practical purposes unmarriageable because it is feared that their lack of lineage will somehow "dilute" or morally "sully" the lineages of respectable families.

Another important right of husbands in Islamic law that may come as a surprise to the reader is the right of a father to have his children breastfed. The Qur'an even specifies the length of time for breastfeeding. A woman who is not able to suckle her own child may hire a wet nurse. Indeed, breastfeeding is considered so important that if a divorce occurs while a woman is breastfeeding a child, the husband must compensate his wife with payment during the breastfeeding period. Children who are breastfed by wet nurses develop very close relationships with them, almost as between biological mother and child. It is believed in Muslim cultures that a child absorbs some of the nature of the person who suckles him. "The Arabs hold that the breast is one of the channels of heredity and that a suckling drinks qualities into his nature from the nurse who suckles him."[4] This is why it is forbidden to marry close relatives of the wet nurse (*murdi'a*) in Islamic law. A man may not marry his "milk" mother, "milk" sister, or "milk" aunt under any circumstances. Similarly, Muslim girls are forbidden from marrying their "milk" brothers.

The schools of law differ as to whether housework is an essential part of a wife's duties. The requirement of doing household chores and the responsibility of looking after the children have become important causes of marital strife in many parts of the modern Muslim world where women have started to enter the workforce. Most traditional jurists agree that since a woman is responsible for her household, such responsibilities include household chores. However, many hadith accounts relate how the Prophet Muhammad regularly assisted in household work in his own home. The belief that women should be responsible for the endless chores generated by housekeeping is often abused by Muslim husbands who expect the wife to contribute to the family income as well as maintain the house and bring up the children.

Finally, mention must be made of the often disputed Qur'anic passage, "Men have authority over women in that God has favored some over others and in what they spend of their possessions for them" (Qur'an 4:34). Commentators on the Qur'an generally interpret this passage as meaning that men have a certain authority over women in so far as they maintain them economically. This is a plausible interpretation because of the wording of the passage itself. However, the Prophet's cousin Ibn 'Abbas, one of the great early commentators on the Qur'an, felt that the verse also referred to the willingness of men to give up some of their marital rights from time to time for the sake of their wives. By acting altruistically or "expending themselves" for their wives, they enjoy a sort of "precedence" as human beings. A similar idea is expressed in the following hadith account: "If a man's wife behaves in a disagreeable manner but he responds with kindness and patience, God will reward him as much as Job was rewarded for his forbearance."[5] This tradition and the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas express the concept of *husn al-'ishra*, "harmonious coexistence" or "mutual companionship," which is both a goal of

Islamic marriage and a right that both husband and wife can expect from each other. In an Islamic marriage, both spouses have a fundamental right to be treated with kindness, respect, and dignity at all times.

MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

> I am God (*Allah*) and I am the Merciful (*al-Rahman*). I created the womb (*rahm*) and I gave it a name derived from My own name. If someone cuts off the womb, I will cut him off, but if someone joins the womb, I will join him to Me.[6]

This divine tradition (*hadith qudsi*) expresses the sanctity and importance of the womb in Islam as a symbol of femininity and as a reflection of God's mercy in creation. This concept is also expressed in the first verse of *Surat al-Nisa'* (The Women) of the Qur'an: "Be mindful of God, by whom you claim rights of one another and be mindful of the wombs" (Qur'an 4:1). The connection in the Arabic language between the womb and the concept of mercy is clear in both form and meaning. The Arabic root *rahima,* "to be merciful," produces the noun *rahma,* "mercy," and the divine names, *al-Rahman,* the Merciful, and *al-Rahim,* the Compassionate, which open almost every *Sura* of the Qur'an. The same root produces the word *rahm,* "womb." This powerful linking of terms stresses the sacredness of the womb and provides a strong justification for the respect given to mothers in Islam. The divine attribute of mercy is reflected in the mercy bestowed by a mother on her children from pregnancy through birth, and even after her children are brought into the world. Divine mercy is also reflected in the care that a mother gives to the child that is born from her womb. The essence of motherhood in Islam is mercy, and mercy is the most important of God's attributes. As the Qur'an affirms, "Call on God (*Allah*) or call on the Merciful (*al-Rahman*)" (Qur'an 17:1).

For most women, carrying out the duties of motherhood comes easily, as nurturing is in the nature of femininity. The love and care that a mother extends toward her children is a reflection of the loving mercy of God toward all of His creatures. The importance of mercy as a sign of God is confirmed in the following hadith: "Verily, on the same day that God created the Heavens and the Earth, he created one hundred parts of mercy (*rahma*). Every part of mercy is analogous to the space between the Heavens and the Earth. Out of this mercy He sent one part to the world, and it is from this that a mother shows affection to her child."[7]

The quality of nurturing, so essential in bringing up and educating children, is a natural God-given gift to women. In man, nurturing is also possible, but it is less "natural" and usually has to be acquired. If the reward of compensation to mothers for their self-sacrifice in this world is not always evident, Islam guarantees it in the next world: "Paradise is at the feet of mothers" is a well-known hadith. It has already been mentioned that one of

the primary responsibilities of men in Islam is to assure that females are protected and honored, precisely because of their role as the bearers and nurturers of new life.

FILIAL LOYALTY AND FAMILY BONDS

> Oh humankind! Be mindful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul; the He created its mate from it and from the twain He spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be mindful of your duty toward Allah in whom you claim your rights of one another, and toward the wombs. Verily, God has always been a watcher over you.
>
> (Qur'an 4:1)

This verse, the opening of the chapter (*Sura*) of the Qur'an titled "The Women," reminds us of the responsibilities we have toward the wombs that bore us but also toward those born of the same womb, who are thus our closest kin. "Womb bonds" (*silat al-rahm*) such as these are created by marriage. The above Qur'anic verse reiterates the importance of generosity and loyalty toward those who are closest to us by virtue of kinship. This verse also implies that Eve was the bearer of the first womb: "And from the twain [Adam and Eve] He spread abroad a multitude of men and women." The marriage of a man and a woman has a great impact on other people, bringing together two sets of fathers and mothers, and then uncles, aunts, and other relatives. As we start moving outward, drawing greater circles of people into the marital bond, the total number may include up to a hundred people. Theoretically, we could continue drawing wider and wider circles of relationships, until we included everyone in the world, such that all of us become "universal brothers and sisters" descended from the common womb of *Sayyidatuna Hawa,* "Our Lady Eve" in Arabic.[8] This may be another reason why the Qur'an extols us not to sever the bonds of the womb.

Not only do we have a responsibility toward our nearest of kin, but we also have a responsibility to honor and sustain what was left behind. We owe gratitude to those who went before us, as we are sustained in their shadow. Marriage thus produces both family ties and filial loyalty. The Prophet Muhammad exemplified this perfectly by maintaining excellent relationships with everyone in his large extended family and circle of companions. Like marriage, the practice of filial loyalty, honoring those who came before us, has been an obligatory part of all the world's cultures except our modern culture, which prides itself on innovation and departing from the usages of the past. Filial loyalty, by contrast, prepares us for the future by encouraging us to honor the past.

Each traditional culture places a different emphasis on filial loyalty. The Islamic version of this concept focuses primarily on honoring the mother. For males, filial loyalty means that a father has the right for a child to take

his name such that his name is perpetuated through continuing generations. Muslim children take their father's name but a wife retains her own father's name, thus honoring her own posterity. In their most extreme forms, rebellion against one's parents and the ''Generation Gap'' that have been so typical of our age are rebellions against filial loyalty. As such, if they are not prompted by actual cases of abuse but are simply expressions of disrespect, they constitute a rebellion not only against one's parents and traditions but also against God.

POLYGYNY AS A POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIP IN MARRIAGE

Some years ago, I was privileged to know and study under a well-known teacher of Qur'anic recitation, Sheikh Abdeslam Derkaoui of Salé in Morocco. The Derkaoui family has an honored spiritual lineage in Morocco because they founded a great spiritual brotherhood, the Darqawiyya Sufi order, in the eighteenth century. Sheikh Abdeslam moved from the mountains of northern Morocco to the Rabat-Salé area to teach the Qur'an in the public school system. Before moving, he had married a woman from his own clan. The couple never had children. When his wife had passed the age of menopause and it was clear that she would not be able to bear any children, the Sheikh took a second wife from his native mountain region. Before marrying his second wife, he obtained his first wife's permission. Within several years, at the age of 70, the Sheikh was the proud father of six offspring. The first wife retained a position of honor in the family until her death. The second wife, always in deference to the first, devoted herself to the upbringing of her children. In this way, the Derkaoui lineage, posterity, and traditions were preserved.

Let us now return to Ali, Wafa, and Aziza, the polygynous Egyptian family that we met at the beginning of this chapter. The marriage was successful because each partner in the triangular relationship was willing to sacrifice a lesser good for a greater benefit. Ali married a girl with a disability and vowed to sustain her economically and emotionally for the rest of their lives. Wafa agreed to Aziza's becoming part of the family, thus sacrificing some of her marital rights in return for the prospect of having children. Aziza sacrificed some of her marital rights by sharing her husband's attentions with Wafa, who had already been married to Ali for more than 15 years.

The objective of permitting polygyny in Islam is to regulate, albeit strictly, the desires that are natural to many men, with a view to preserving marital relationships within the framework of sacred law. This is in contrast to most Western societies, where sexual freedom has become commonplace and even adultery may be considered ''normal.'' Islamic rulings seek to limit the irresponsible gratification of desires by sanctifying human sexuality and channeling desire to obtain spiritual and social benefits. In criticizing polygyny in

Islamic society, non-Muslims forget that, according to anthropologists, polygyny has existed in almost every society. The Qur'an clearly allows for polygyny, but it also points out, "You will not be able to treat all of [your] women equally, even though you may desire to do so" (Qur'an 4:129). Many women in the Muslim world are unaware that under most Sunni schools of law, a woman can stipulate monogamy in her marriage contract.

Most Islamic scholars today believe that the permission to practice polygyny in early Islam was a response to the needs of the time. During the early period of Islamic history, this ruling was a grace, since it allowed for widows and orphans to be cared for in an environment of constant warfare, which took the lives of many early Muslims and left many widows. Mention should also be made of the polygynous marriages of the Prophet Muhammad. One should not forget, however, that Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, was his only wife for the entire 24 years of their marriage. Later marriages of the Prophet coincided with the more social phase of his delivering the Islamic revelation. The Prophet's wives were called "Mothers of the Believers," and they have been likened to jewels in a crown. They considered themselves blessed and privileged to be members of the Prophet's household. Despite the inevitable difficulties that arose in the Prophet's household because of human nature, none of his wives ever wanted a divorce. In his Introduction to *Sura* 66 (*al-Tahrim*) of the Qur'an, Mohammad M. Pickthall summarizes the Islamic position on polygyny thusly:

> For Muslims, monogamy is the ideal, polygamy the concession to human nature. Having set a great example of monogamic [*sic.*] marriage, the Prophet was to set a great example of polygamic [*sic.*] marriage by following which, men of that temperament could live righteous lives. He encountered all the difficulties inherent in the situation and when he made mistakes, the Qur'an helped him to retrieve them. Al-Islam did not institute polygamy. It restricted an existing institution by limiting the number of a man's legal wives, by giving to every woman a legal personality and legal rights which had to be respected, and making every man legally responsible for his conduct toward every woman.[9]

MARRIAGE AS SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT

Whereas some religions, such as Christianity and Buddhism, encourage celibacy as an important virtue and support for spiritual fulfillment, Islam strongly recommends marriage. "Marriage is half of religion," is a well-known hadith and is illustrative of the emphasis that Islam places on marriage. What does "half of religion" mean in this context? Marriage not only qualifies men and women to fulfill their social functions in life but also requires self-sacrifice, self-effacement, and humility. Because of this combination of virtues, Islam has been called "a society of married monks." What this metaphor means is that all people, both men and women, should aspire to a

higher level of spiritual awareness within the context of marriage. Women in particular are offered many opportunities for practicing self-effacement because their active lives revolve around their children for many years. When her children are young, a mother gives freely of herself and her time in the interest of her offspring, a commitment that usually continues for the rest of her life. This type of self-sacrifice and the compromises that are necessary between partners in a successful marriage chip away at the solidity of the ego, which is pleasing to God. Spiritual masters of all of the great religions teach that the ego is a major obstacle to reaching God. Even if a person is less interested in reaching God than having a successful marriage, the latter still requires the sacrifice of self.

Many Muslim women find spiritual, social, and emotional fulfillment in marriage. Islamic tradition situates much of such fulfillment in the wife's service to her husband, a notion that is often misunderstood by Westerners who are committed to viewing Islam as antiwoman. However, when the Prophet Muhammad said, "Paradise is the reward of the wife who pleases her husband until death," he did not mean that a wife is the chattel of her husband. Instead, he sought to stress the spiritual maturity that comes from giving selflessly to others, a message that can also be found in Western sources, such as Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In a similar vein, the Prophet said, "The gates of Paradise will be wide open to welcome the woman who observes her prayers, fasts the month of Ramadan, preserves her honor, and obeys her husband."

Shortly before my marriage, I sought spiritual counsel and was told that marriage was a "school for the soul." After being enrolled in this "school" for over 25 years, I have often found that I have only begun to learn the lessons of this "school" because the notion of the "self" that shrouds the heart is very hard. To crack this hard shell of egoism, marriage encourages self-effacement and lays the soul open to the spouse who knows us intimately. The great mystical teachers of Islam have said that for the spiritual man, the beauty of a woman reminds him of the beauty of Paradise, which he carries within himself. For a woman, the goodness and virtue of a man is a support and confirmation of her own inner goodness.

However, we also find in the Qur'an: "Oh you who believe! Verily, among your spouses and your children there are enemies for you, therefore beware of them; but if you efface, overlook, and forgive [their faults], then Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. Your wealth and your children are a temptation for you, whereas with Allah is an immense reward" (Qur'an 64:14–15). How are we supposed to understand such verses? One way to understand them is to see marriage as a "double-edged sword," in the sense that attachments to children and spouses, as well as to material possessions, can cloud one's spiritual vision and prevent a person from moving toward God. The "Holy War" in a marriage is the struggle to find a balance between offering love and mercy to one's spouse and children and at the same time

attending to those elements of one's own soul that turn one away from the remembrance of God. If a person is able to achieve this balance, she has indeed accomplished "half of the religion" through her marriage.

As Muslim societies race toward modernity, they often spiral into rampant materialism and purely material values. One flagrant repercussion of these material values is the neglect of personal commitments and responsibilities to family, friends, and other members of society. Because it is a reflection of the Divine duality, marriage is one of the most important commitments we can make in our lives. The union of a man and a woman symbolizes the unity of God and the potential union of the soul with the Divine Spirit. Seen positively, this sacred union has the potential to symbolically "re-create" the whole or complete human being through the marital union. Seen negatively, the dissolution of the marriage bond may "un-create"—through an artificial act of separation—the person, who is otherwise meant to be whole. By honoring through marriage their commitment to God and each other, Muslims fulfill their double earthly role of God's slave and God's vice-regent. As the Prophet Muhammad said, "The best of you are those who are best to their women."

NOTES

1. From the point of view of Arabic grammar, it is ambiguous as to which gender was created first, the male or the female. Since the word for soul (*nafs*) is feminine, this verse of the Qur'an could equally refer to the soul of a male or the soul of a female. Thus, the possessive pronoun "her" in the phrase that follows ("and created from her/it its mate") refers to the soul and does not necessarily imply that the original nature of both men and women is female. In terms of historical creation, however, the Qur'an reaffirms the general outlines of the Biblical creation story of Adam, in which man is created before woman.

2. Lamya Farouki, *Women, Muslim Society and Islam* (Plainfield, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1994), 17.

3. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, *The Islamic View of Women and the Family* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1977), 49.

4. Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London, U.K.: George Allen and Unwin and Islamic Texts Society, 1983), 24.

5. Hamza Yusuf Hanson, "The Rights and Responsibilities of Marriage," course recorded on CD, delivered at Zaytuna Institute (Hayward, California: Alhambra Productions, 2002) with reference to Al-Ghazali, op. cit. II, 30.

6. *Sunan Ibn Maja* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1952), Vol. 1, 594.

7. *Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001), 1056 (hadith no. 2,753).

8. Hamza Yusuf Hanson, "The Rights and Responsibilities of Marriage."

9. *The Glorious Qur'an,* Text and Explanatory Translation by Mohammad M. Pickthall (London, U.K.: The Islamic Festival Publications, 1976), 750.

5

Respect for the Mother in Islam

Aliah Schleifer

The relationship of the Muslim with his parents should be of the highest order of human relationships. This includes spiritual, financial, and emotional responsibilities, and is ongoing, even beyond the point of death. Ordinances are defined in the Qur'an relating to this point and are further specified by Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and commentary. The reward for satisfactory compliance with the Qur'anic ordinances is Paradise. Mu'awiyya ibn Jahma narrated that Jahma went to the Prophet Muhammad and said, ''Oh Messenger of Allah, I want to fight and I have come to ask your advice.'' The Prophet asked, ''Do you have a mother?'' ''Yes,'' Jahma said. The Prophet then said, ''Then stay with her because Paradise is under her foot.''[1] Abu Umama narrated: ''They are your Paradise and your Hell-fire''—that is, the parents.[2]

Thus, the clarification of these ordinances becomes essential to a Muslim, who wishes to know exactly how he can attain this reward, and exactly what will block him from it. In general, most statements of responsibility to parents include both father and mother, but the mother, in Islam, is granted more in this respect. Abu Hurayra narrated that a man came to the Messenger of Allah and asked, ''Oh Messenger of Allah, who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?'' The Prophet said, ''Your mother.'' Then the man said, ''Then who?'' The Prophet said, ''Your mother,'' ''Then who?'' The Prophet said, ''Then your father.''[3]

Nawawi says that the Arabic term *al-sahaba* used in this hadith means ''companionship.'' It is intended to urge one toward kindness to relatives, the most deserving of whom is the mother and then the father. Giving the opinion of the *ulama* (the Muslim scholars), he says that the reason for giving the mother preference is due to her exhausting efforts for the sake of her child; her compassion; her service; the great difficulty of pregnancy, delivery, nursing, and rearing of the child; her service and care for the child when it is sick; and so on. In the view of the ulama, the mother is the strongest member of the family in kindness and devotion.[4]

Two verses in the Qur'an provide general injunctions to the believers to practice good treatment of parents. The first says: "Worship Allah alone and be kind to parents" (Qur'an 2:83). In their commentaries on this verse, Tabari, Ibn Kathir, and Qurtubi are in agreement about the meaning of the accusative noun, *ihsanan,* which is usually translated as "be good to," but Ibn Kathir devotes more discussion to good speech toward parents, while both Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir stress parents' rights.

Tabari states that grammatically, the expression *wa bi'l-walidayni ihsanan* ("and be kind to parents") is connected to the preceding expression, *la ta'buduna illa Allah* ("worship Allah alone"), and thus their meanings are connected.[5] Speaking of the two connected expressions, Ibn Kathir says that these are the highest and greatest of rights, that is, the rights of Allah, Most Blessed and Most High, that He be worshipped alone, with nothing associated with Him; then, after that, is the right of His creatures, and He firmly commissions them and their children with the right of parents. Thus, Allah draws a parallel between His right and the right of parents.[6] Qurtubi says that Allah, the Great and Lofty, makes a parallel in this verse, between the right of parents and the Unity of Allah because the first formation (genesis) proceeds from Allah, and the second formation—upbringing—proceeds from the parents. Thus, Allah compares thankfulness to parents with thankfulness to Him, this being expressed explicitly in Qur'an 31:14, "Give thanks to Me and to your parents."[7]

By way of explanation of the meaning of *ihsanan,* Tabari says it is to show kindness to parents, courteous speech, the lowering of the wing of submission as a mercy to them, tenderness, compassion, prayer for good to come to them, and other similar deeds. Qurtubi reiterates this definition, adding that the believers should keep up relationships with the people their parents love.[8] To explain the meaning of *ihsanan,* Ibn Kathir refers to Hasan al-Basri's definition of another form of the word, *husnan,* which is also found in Qur'anic verse 2:83. Basri defines *husnan* with reference to speech, as such speech "that commands kindness, terminates objectionable remarks, and is gentle, and restrains one and pardons."[9] To further clarify his definition, Ibn Kathir quotes the following hadith: Abu Dharr narrated that the Prophet said, "Do not show the slightest contempt for the concept of kindness. If you do not find any good to do, greet your brother with a bright face."[10] Ibn Kathir concludes that Allah commands His creatures to speak good speech to the people after He has commanded them to do well to others in deed; thus, He unites between the extremities of goodness of deed and that of goodness of speech.

In their discussion of the second Qur'anic injunction of a general nature about parents—"Show kindness to parents, to kinsfolk and orphans, and to the needy" (Qur'an 4:36)—the three commentators express a restatement of their previous opinions on the subject. Qurtubi, however, includes an additional hadith, which succinctly expresses the importance of the child–parent relationship. According to Shu'ba and Hashim al-Wastiyan,

'Abdallah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "The satisfaction of the Lord is in the satisfaction of the parents, and the displeasure of the Lord is in the displeasure of the parents."[11]

The following hadiths are a further illustration of the immense importance, in Islam, that is given to kindness and service to parents in general, and to the mother in particular. Ibn 'Abbas narrated that the Prophet said: "Safeguard the love for your parents. Do not cut it off or your light will be extinguished by Allah."[12] 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ud narrated: "I asked the Messenger of Allah which deed was the preferred one?" He said, "Prayer at its proper time." Then I asked, "Which is next?" He said, "Kindness to parents." Then I asked, "Which is next?" He said, "Fighting for the sake of Allah."[13]

'Abdallah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As narrated that the Messenger of Allah excused a man from *jihad*. He asked, "Are your parents alive?" "Yes," the man replied. He said, "Then struggling in their service is your *jihad*."[14] Anas ibn Malik narrated that a man came to the Messenger of Allah and said, "I longed to go on *jihad,* but I was not able to do so." The Prophet asked, "Is either one of your parents alive?" "My mother," the man said. The Prophet said, "Allah has instructed us in devotion to her, so if you do thus, you are as one who has made the *Hajj* pilgrimage, the *'Umra* pilgrimage, and has participated in *jihad*."[15]

Ibn 'Umar narrated that a man came to the Messenger of Allah and said, "I have committed a great sin. Is there anything I can do to repent?" The Prophet asked, "Do you have a mother?" "No," the man said. He asked, "Do you have a maternal aunt?" "Yes," the man said. He said, "Then, be kind and devoted to her."[16] Talaq ibn 'Ali narrated that the Prophet said: "If I became aware of my parents, or one of them, and I had begun the evening prayer and had recited *Surat al-Fatiha;* and my mother called me—I would have answered her."[17] Ibn 'Abbas narrated that the Prophet said: "Do not leave your mother unless she gives you permission or death takes her because that is the greatest deed for your reward."[18] Ibn 'Abbas narrated that the Prophet said: "Whoever kisses his mother between the eyes has protection from the Fire."[19]

With respect to financial responsibility to needy parents, the Qur'an addresses this point clearly: "That which you spend for good is for parents, near kindred and orphans, and the poor and the wayfarer" (Qur'an 2:215). Thus, among the categories of needy persons for whom financial support is due, parents come first. The consensus of the three commentators is that this verse implies the appropriateness of voluntary charity to needy parents, above and beyond the annually required compulsory charity (*Zakat*).

Tabari states that the reference is to voluntary charity. Ibn Kathir concurs with Tabari's opinion but also presents Muqatil ibn Hayyan's opinion that this interpretation was subsequently abrogated by (the commandment to pay) *Zakat*. Qurtubi says it was not abrogated and that there are two different issues, one being voluntary charity and the other compulsory charity.

Tabari's explication reemphasizes the fact that the Qur'anic injunction refers to both parents, the mother as well as the father. Thus, he says the meaning of the verse is that your companions, Oh Muhammad, ask you what they should spend out of their wealth on voluntary charity, and on whom they should spend it. So say to them: What you spend of your wealth as voluntary charity, use it for your fathers and your mothers and your relatives, and the orphans among you and the needy and the wayfarers. Therefore, whatever you do of good, do it for them. Verily, Allah is aware of it, and He records for you, until you die, your reward for it on the Day of Resurrection. Also, He rewards you for what you give out of kindness. Thus, the *khayr*, the good, that the Most Lofty, May He Be Praised, stated in this verse of His, is your wealth, the spending of which the Companions asked the Messenger of Allah about, and Allah answered them in this verse.[20] Qurtubi specifies the Companion for whom this verse was revealed as 'Amr ibn al-Jamuh, who was at that time an old man. He said, "Oh Messenger of Allah, my wealth is great, so what should I give in charity, and on whom should I spend it?" Consequently, according to Qurtubi, this verse was revealed.[21]

Ibn Kathir records, in reference to Ibn Hayyan's comment above, that as-Suddi said there is speculation about this; in other words, it is not a generally accepted opinion.[22] Qurtubi clarifies his position on the question posed by Ibn Hayyan's opinion, stating that Ibn Jurayj and others said that *Zakat* is different from the spending mentioned in this verse; therefore, there is no abrogation of it. He goes on to say that it is clearly the spending of voluntary charity, and it is obligatory on the man of means that he spends on his needy parents what is suitable for their status and compatible with his financial status, for food and clothing, and so on.[23]

This primacy of concern for parents' needs is expressly illustrated by the following excerpt from a longer hadith:

> 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar reported that Allah's Messenger told the following story: Three persons set out on a journey. They were overtaken by rain and they had to find protection in a mountain cave, when at its mouth there fell a rock of that mountain, and this blocked them altogether. One of them said to the others, "Examine your good deeds that you performed for the sake of Allah and then supplicate Allah the Exalted, that He might rescue you from this trouble." One of them said, "Oh Allah, I had my parents who were old and my wife and small children also. I tended the flocks and when I came back to them in the evening, I did the milking and served that milk to my parents, before serving my children. One day, when I was obliged to go out to a distant place in search of fodder and could not come back before evening, I found my parents asleep. I milked the animals as usual, and brought milk to them and stood at their heads avoiding disturbing them from sleep, and I did not deem it advisable to serve milk to my children before serving them. I remained there in that state and my parents too until morning. Oh Allah, if You are aware that I did this in order to seek Your pleasure, then give us an opening that we may see the sky." And Allah gave them an opening.[24]

Sura 6, verse 151 of the Qur'an reemphasizes the parallel between submission to Allah, the One, and submission to His command of good treatment to parents: "that you ascribe nothing as a partner to [Allah] and that you act with goodness toward parents" (Qur'an 6:151). However, the commentary on this verse further reveals that this obligation is due regardless of similarity or difference of religion; that is, the Muslim is bound to offer respect and service to parents, whether they be Muslims, Christians, Jews, or even polytheists.

Qurtubi says that grammatically, the word *al-ihsan* ("goodness") in the above Qur'anic verse is a noun *masdar* in the accusative case, which is made accusative by a missing verb; thus, the implied meaning is to do the highest degree of good to your parents. He further defines *al-ihsan* to parents as respecting them, protecting them, caring for them, obedience to their commands, and not treating them as slaves but rather giving them the position of authority.[25] Ibn Kathir points out that the comparison between submission to Allah and reverence to parents is mentioned many times in the Qur'an and adds that if the parents are nonbelievers, showing kindness and respect to them is sufficient, thus implying that the Muslim is bound to his obligations to his parents, with the exception of parental commands that are contra-Islam.[26]

The following two accounts illustrate the insistence in Islam on reverence and kindness to one's mother, regardless of religious difference. Shaqiq ibn Wa'il said: "My mother died a Christian, so I went to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (the second Caliph after the Prophet Muhammad, r. 634–644 CE) and told him this." He said, "Mount an animal and ride in front of her bier at the front of the funeral procession."[27] Asma' the daughter of Abu Bakr reported: "My mother, who was a polytheist, came to me when the Prophet entered into a treaty with the Quraysh tribe of Mecca." I inquired from the Messenger of Allah, saying, "Oh Messenger of Allah, my mother has come to me and she is afraid. Should I show her kindness?" He said, "Yes, treat her kindly."[28]

When parents reach the period of old age, this is the time which offers the Muslim the greatest opportunity to fulfill his obligations to them, and thus hope to gain Allah's pleasure. Muslims are counseled to keep in mind the fact that their elderly parents were devoted to them when they were in need of care as a child, while at the same time to remember that they are parents, not children, with all the rights and privileges due to them as such.

The Qur'an speaks directly to the question of the treatment of parents in old age: "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none save Him, and that you show kindness to parents. If one or both of them attain old age with you, say not 'Uff!' to them nor repulse them, but speak to them graciously. And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: 'My Lord, have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little'" (Qur'an 17:23–24). The Qur'an also stresses the obligation to parents and

its nature in the following verse: "[John the Baptist] was dutiful toward his parents; he was neither arrogant nor rebellious" (Qur'an 19:14).

In their discussion of Sura 17:23–24, Tabari and Ibn Kathir apply their previous comments on the child–parent relationship with some specification for the period of old age. Qurtubi, however, uses these verses as an opportunity to give his full exegesis on the subject. Tabari emphasizes that because of the words *wa qada rabbuka* ("your Lord has decreed"), this is a command from Allah to show kindness to parents, to do good to them, and to respect them. He says the meaning of the verses is not to grumble or utter a complaint about something that you see in one of them or both—a kind of muttering that people are hurt by, but rather, to be patient with them in anticipation of spiritual reward, as they were patient with you when you were young.[29] He then refers to Mujahid's statement that the reference in these verses is to the case where your parents are senile, in the condition of feces and urine, as you were as a baby, and you say "Uff!" to them.[30] As a further comment on the meaning of "Uff!" Tabari includes 'Ata'illah ibn Abi Rabah's statement, on the authority of Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Ahmasi: "Don't brush your parents aside;" that is, do not treat them as if they were insignificant. Having stated what not to do, the verse then describes what to do by stating, *wa qul lahuma qawlan kariman* ("but speak to them graciously"), which is explained by Ibn Jurayj on the authority of al-Qasim: "The best that you can find of speech."[31]

Qurtubi says that reverence and goodness to parents is that you do not insult or blaspheme them because this is, without argument, one of the major sins. To qualify his statement and to illustrate the depth of its meaning, Qurtubi refers to the following hadith. 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "Verily, abuse of one's parents is one of the major sins." They said, "Oh Messenger of Allah, does a man abuse his parents?" "Yes," he said. "The man insults the father of another man, so the other man insults the first one's father, and he insults the other one's mother and vice-versa."[32] Also, in another hadith, the blasphemer of parents is placed on a par with the idol worshipper and the unwarranted innovator: 'Ali said, "Allah curses whoever curses his parents. Allah curses whoever sacrifices to other than Allah! Allah curses whoever accommodates an innovator. Allah curses whoever changes the boundary lines of the land."[33]

In his commentary on this account, Nawawi confirms that the cursing of the father and the mother is one of the major sins in Islam. To explain the rest of the account, he says that the connotation of *manar al-ard* (literally, "lighthouses of the land") is the limits or the boundary of the land. As for sacrificing to other than Allah, its connotation is one who sacrifices in the name of other than Allah the Most High, like he who sacrifices to the idols or to the cross, or to Moses, Jesus, or the Ka'ba, and so on.[34]

Qurtubi says that the condition of old age is specified in Qur'an 17:23 because this is the state in which parents need kindness owing to the change

in their condition to weakness and old age. With regard to their condition, more kindness and compassion is required because in this state they become more troublesome. In addition, since the burden is the man's duty and is something he has to live with daily, irritation develops and vexation increases; then his anger toward his parents appears, and he flies into a rage at them and becomes arrogant with the boldness of his position and the lack of religion. Qurtubi says the despicable is what he exhibits by indicating his irritation by repeated "heavy breaths." Instead, he is commanded by Allah to receive his parents with speech characterized by respect, the doing of which is his security against shameful acts. Qurtubi includes Abu Raja' al-'Ataridi's statement that "Uff" is speech that is maligning, mean, and concealed. In reference to Mujahid's above-mentioned statement included by Tabari, Qurtubi says that the verse is more general than that and that it refers to the saying of "Uff" to everything that vexes or is a burden.[35]

It is related from a hadith of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, according to which the Messenger of Allah said: "If Allah knew any type of rudeness worse than 'Uff,' He would have mentioned it. So do of the righteous acts what you want to do and you will not enter the Fire, but do of the disrespectful acts what you want to do and you will not enter Paradise."[36]

As a commentary on this hadith, the ulama said: "Accordingly, one's saying 'Uff' to one's parents becomes the worst thing because the rejection of them is an ungrateful rejection and repudiation of one's upbringing, and a rejection of the counsel given in the Qur'an." To prove his point that "Uff" is not an expression to be taken lightly, Qurtubi gives the example of the Prophet Abraham's use of it to show his rejection of idols and idol worshippers, in which Abraham said to his people, "Uff to you and all that you worship instead of Allah!" (Qur'an 21:67). In addition, Qurtubi states that the meaning of *al-nahr* ("repulsion") in Qur'anic verse 17:23 is rebuke and harshness.[37]

To explain the meaning of *wa qul lahuma qawlan kariman* ("but speak to them graciously"), Qurtubi refers to 'Ata's statement in which he says it is polite gentleness; for example, saying, "Oh my father and my mother," without calling them directly by either their first names or their last names.[38] In reference to this part of the verse, Abu al-Baddah al-Tujibi said, "I said to Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib that I understood everything in the Qur'an about reverence to parents except [Allah's] statement, 'but speak to them graciously.' Ibn al-Musayyib said, 'This refers to the sinner slave's speaking rude and harsh words to the master.'" Qurtubi goes on to say that the lending of affection and mercy to parents and submission to them is the submission of the governed to the leader, and that of the slave to the master, as Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib indicated. Thus, the intention of the ruling of this verse is that the person should put himself in a state of maximum submission with respect to his parents, in his speech and his silence and his looks, and should not give them sharp looks, as this is the look of the angered.[39]

In Tabari's explication of Qur'anic verse 17:24, he quotes a statement on the authority of al-Qasim, on the authority of Hisham ibn 'Urwa from his father, that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said, "Do not refuse to do anything [your parents] want."[40] Qurtubi clarifies this point by stating that rudeness to parents is the contradiction of their desires that are legally permissible, just as respecting them is the acceptance of their desires that are legally permissible. Thus, if both or one of them commands, obedience to them is a must if that command is not a sin and if that which is commanded is permissible (*mubah*), likewise if it is recommended (*mandub*). Further, some people hold the view that the parents' command that is permissible for them becomes a recommended duty of the child and that their command which is recommended is increased to be even more highly recommended.[41]

Qurtubi mentions Abu Hurayra's hadith that kindness and compassion to the mother should be three times that to the father and relates it to his discussion of obedience. He mentions similar points as those made by Nawawi and adds that if you come to this conclusion, then the meaning is judged to be an obligation on the individual.[42] Then, he presents various opinions about this point and his own conclusion. First is a contrary opinion. It is reported about Malik (ibn Anas, founder of the Maliki school of jurisprudence, d. 795 CE) that a man said to him, "My father is in the country of the blacks (*al-sudan*) and he wrote to me that I should come to him, but my mother prevents me from doing so." Then Malik said to him, "Obey your father and disobey your mother." Thus, Malik's statement indicates that reverence to both parents is equal as far as he is concerned. Then al-Layth (ibn Sa'id, an early jurist) was asked about this question, and he commanded obedience to the mother, claiming that she gets two-thirds of the devotion of the child. Qurtubi concludes, however, that Abu Hurayra's hadith indicates that the mother gets three-fourths of the devotion, and that is proof for those who dispute the matter. Muhasibi affirms in his book *Kitab al-Ri'aya* (Observance of the Rights Due to God, Ed.; translation added for this volume) that there is no disagreement among the ulama that the mother gets three-fourths of the devotion and the father one-fourth, according to Abu Hurayra's hadith. But Allah knows best.[43]

In his discussion of the phrase *min al-rahma* ("of mercy") in Qur'anic verse 17:24, Qurtubi says that *min* means "the kind of," in other words, that the "lowering of the wing" be a kind of merciful submission of the spirit, not that it be in actions only. Thus, the Most High ordered His slaves to be merciful to their parents and to pray for them. Thus, you should be compassionate to them as they were to you, and befriend them as they did you, remembering that when you were an incapable, needy child, they preferred you to themselves, and they stayed awake nights, and went hungry while they satisfied your appetite, and were in need of clothes while they clothed you. So reward them when they reach old age in the condition that you were in as a child, in that you treat them as they did you, and give kindness to them priority.[44]

> Ibn ʻAbbas reported that the Prophet said: "He who ends the day with his parents satisfied with him and begins the day thus, to him two doors to Paradise are opened; and if it is one parent, then one door. But he who ends and begins the day and is the object of odiousness to his parents, for him, two doors to the Fire are opened; and if it is one parent, then one door." Then a man said, "Oh Messenger of Allah, what if his parents have mistreated him?" He said, "Even if they have mistreated him, even if they have mistreated him, even if they have mistreated him."[45]

In the commentary on Qur'an 19:14, the emphasis is on the importance of obedience to the parents, by way of the example of the Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist), who is praised for his consistent submissiveness and humility before Allah and his parents, doing what he was commanded to do and refraining from what he was forbidden.[46] The following hadiths are further illustrations of the requirement in Islam for such respect and submissiveness to one's mother and father, and an indication of what constitutes disobedience.

Al-Miqdam ibn Maʻdikarib narrated that the Prophet said: "Indeed, Allah has warned you about your responsibility to your fathers; indeed Allah has warned you about your responsibility to your mothers; indeed Allah has warned you about your responsibility to your mothers; indeed Allah has warned you about your responsibility toward your mothers; indeed Allah has warned you about your responsibility to your relatives; so look to your relatives."[47]

Abu Malik al-Qushayri narrated that the Prophet said: "If someone's parents, or even one of them, dies and then he enters the Fire, Allah will disassociate Himself from him and will destroy Him."[48] In other words, being kind to his parents would have saved him from the Fire. Abu Hurayra reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "Let his pride be in the dust; let his pride be in the dust; let his pride be in the dust." It was asked, "Oh Messenger of Allah, who is he?" He said, "He who finds his parents in old age, either one of them or both of them, and does not enter Paradise."[49] Nawawi comments on this tradition: "Let his pride be in the dust" for not revering his parents with his service to them or providing for them; thus, he lost his chance for Paradise.[50]

ʻAbdallah ibn ʻAmr narrated that a man came to the Prophet pledging himself to go on the *hijra* (emigration) with the Prophet (from Mecca to Medina). He left his parents crying. The Prophet said, "Return to them and make them laugh as you have made them cry."[51] ʻAli said, "Whoever saddens his parents has disobeyed them."[52] ʻAbdullah ibn ʻAmr ibn al-ʻAs narrated that the Prophet said: "The major sins are associating anything with Allah, rudeness to parents, killing anyone, and swearing a false oath purposefully."[53] In a longer hadith, Abu ʻIsa al-Mughira narrated that the Prophet said: "Verily, Allah forbade you rudeness and disobedience toward mothers."[54]

Respect and kindness to the mother even extends beyond her death. This includes prayers for her forgiveness and the completion of various obligations to her. The Qur'an provides examples of such prayers on behalf of believing parents and a reminder to the Muslim to be grateful for having this opportunity: "Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers on the Day of Reckoning" (Qur'an 14:41). "My Lord, arouse me to be thankful for Your favor, through which You have favored me and my parents" (Qur'an 27:19). "My Lord, forgive me and my parents, and the one who enters my house believing, and [all] believing men and believing women" (Qur'an 71:28).

The three commentators apparently find the meaning of these verses so obvious that they do not require additional explanation. However, in Qurtubi's previous discussion of "as they cared for me" in Qur'an 17:24, he mentions that the reference is to believing parents, as the Qur'an abrogated asking for forgiveness for the nonbelievers, even if they are the closest relatives: "It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to pray for the forgiveness of idolaters, even though they may be near of kin" (Qur'an 9:113). Thus, if the Muslim's parents are nonbelievers, he should treat them as Allah has commanded him to, with respect, kindness, and so on, except for the mercy to them after death as nonbelievers, because this alone was invalidated by the verse mentioned. An additional comment clarifies that prayers for mercy in this world for the nonbelieving parents that are still alive is not invalidated by this verse.[55] Abu Hurayra narrated that the Messenger of Allah said, "I asked my Lord's permission to ask forgiveness for my mother, but He did not allow me to do so. Then I asked for His permission to visit her grave, and He allowed me to do so."[56]

Nawawi's commentary on this hadith is that contained in it is permission for visiting the polytheist during liftetime and the grave after death. His argument is that if permission is given to visit the polytheist after death, then it must include during the lifetime, because this has more priority and is in accordance with Allah's command of the best of companionship to all people during one's lifetime. He goes on to say that contained in this hadith is the prohibition of asking forgiveness for nonbelievers after death.[57]

The following hadith indicates that a reward is forthcoming for the one who visits his parents' grave. Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet said: "Whoever visits one or more of his parents' graves once every week, Allah forgives him and he will be recorded among the righteous."[58] The next two hadiths indicate additional obligations due to parents after death and the reward for fulfilling them.

Abu Asad Malik ibn Rabi'a al-Sa'di said that when we were with the Messenger of Allah a man from Banu Salama came and asked: "Oh Messenger of Allah, is there any remaining chance to show devotion to my parents after they have died?" "Yes," he said, "prayer for them, asking forgiveness for them, fulfilling their contracts after them, keeping up the family relations that

they used to maintain, and respecting their friends."[59] Ibn 'Abbas narrated: "Whoever performs the pilgrimage for his parents or terminates a debt for them, Allah sends him forth among the righteous on the Day of Ascension."

In summary, according to Islam, gratitude to parents is on the highest human level, such that it is compared with the ultimate gratitude, that due to Allah. Service to parents is second only to prayer and its fulfillment to elderly parents absolves one from participation in *jihad*. Good treatment of parents, in their lifetime and after death, is an established right due to them, not a gratuitous act, and involves all aspects of human behavior, great or small, to be expressed to the limits of human feasibility. Furthermore, utmost respect is due to them, regardless of religion, physical condition, or social status. The concern and respect for the mother, specifically, is a way of expiating sin and a clear way for the believer to become closer to Allah and to ward off the Fire.

NOTES

This chapter first appeared as a chapter in Aliah Schleifer, *Motherhood in Islam* (Louisville, Kentucky: Islamic Texts Society and Fons Vitae, 1996). It is reproduced here with minor modifications by permission of the publisher.

1. Muhammad Siddiq Khan, *Husn al-uswa bi-ma thabita min Allah wa Rasulihi fi al-niswa* (Beirut: Mu'assasa ar-Risala, 1976), 236.

2. 'Ala' al-Din ibn Husam al-Din al-Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿumal fi sunan al-aqwal* (Hyderabad, India: Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyya, 1364/1945), vol. 16, 463 (hadith number 45,453).

3. *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Chicago, Illinois: Kazi Publications, 1979), vol. 8, 2; Khan, *Husn al-uswa,* 235; see Ismail Abdul Razack and Abdul Jawad al-Banna, *Women and Family in the Sunnah of the Prophet* (Arabic text included), International Centre for Population Studies and Research, Al-Azhar University (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, n.d.), 32, for another narration of this hadith.

4. Abu al-Hasan Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim bi-sharh al-Nawawi* (Cairo, 1924), vol. 16, 102.

5. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan ʿan ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 3rd printing, 1388/1968), vol. 1, 390.

6. 'Imad ad-Din Abi'l-Fida' Isma'il Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-ʿazim* (Cairo: Dar al-Qutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d.), vol. 1, 119.

7. Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ li-ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi li-al-Taba' wa al-Nashr, 1387/1967), vol. 2, 13.

8. Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan,* vol. 1, 390; Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 2, 13.

9. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir,* vol. 1, 120.

10. Ibid.

11. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 5, 183.

12. Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿulum,* vol. 16, 464 (hadith no. 45,460).
13. *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 2, 73.
14. Khan, *Husn al-uswa,* 236.
15. Ibid., 514.
16. Ibid., 237.
17. Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿulum,* vol. 16, 470 (hadith no. 45,500).
18. Ibid., 472 (hadith no. 45,504).
19. Ibid., 462 (hadith no. 45,442).
20. Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan,* vol. 2, 342.
21. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 3, 36.
22. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir,* vol. 1, 251.
23. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 3, 37.
24. *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 17, 55–56.
25. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 7, 132.
26. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir,* vol. 2, 187–188.
27. Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿumal,* vol. 16, 577 (hadith no. 45,929).
28. *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 7, 89.
29. Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan,* vol. 15, 63.
30. Ibid., 64.
31. Ibid., 65.
32. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 10, 238; see also, Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Riyad al-Salihin* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 108 (hadith no. 338).
33. Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿulum,* vol. 16, 480 (hadith no. 45,546).
34. *Sahih Muslim bi-sharh al-Nawawi,* vol. 13, 141.
35. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 10, 241–242.
36. Ibid., 243.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.; see also Khan, *Husn al-uswa* 80, 114–115.
39. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 10, 243–244.
40. Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan,* vol. 15, 65.
41. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 10, 238.
42. Ibid., 239.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 244.
45. Ibid., 245.
46. Tabari, *Jamiʿ al-Bayan,* vol. 12, 58.
47. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir,* vol. 3, 35.
48. Ibid.
49. *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 16, 109.
50. Ibid., 108–109.
51. Hindi, *Kanz al-ʿulum,* vol. 16, 478 (hadith no. 45,537).
52. Nawawi, *Riyad al-Salihin,* vol. 7, 45 (hadith no. 337).
53. Ibid., 108 (hadith no. 340).
54. Qurtubi, *al-Jamiʿ,* vol. 10, 244–245.

55. *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 7, 45.

56. Ibid.

57. Hindi, *Kanz al-'ulum*, vol. 16, 468 (hadith no. 45,487).

58. Abu Dawud Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistani, *al-Sunan* (Cairo: Maktabat al-'Arab, 1863), vol. 2, 216–217.

59. Hindi, *Kanz al-'ulum*, vol. 16, 468 (hadith no. 45,485).

6

Pregnancy and Childbirth in Islam

Aliah Schleifer

From the Islamic point of view, marriage is the desired state of affairs. The Prophet Muhammad said: ''If the slave (of Allah) marries, he has completed half of the religion; so let him fear Allah (through worship and service) with the remaining half.''[1]

Childbirth is considered the natural outcome of marriage. The Muslim woman sees pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and rearing as spiritual acts. It is her exclusive opportunity to obtain Allah's blessings and rewards, as the difficulty of pregnancy and childbirth is a way that Allah has allotted only to the female sex. On the one hand, she has been endowed with suitable characteristics for the task, and on the other, she is to be rewarded for her efforts by her children. Thus, even if she does no more than simply bring them into this world, they are bound, as Muslims, to respect and have concern for her. The following two Qur'anic verses clearly indicate the obligation on the Muslim of reverence to the mother because of her childbearing responsibilities:

> We have enjoined on the human being concerning his parents: His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. So give thanks to Me and to your parents. Unto Me is the journey.
>
> (Qur'an 31:14)

> We have enjoined on the human being kindness toward his parents. His mother bears him with reluctance, and brings him forth with reluctance. The bearing of him and the weaning of him are thirty months, till, when he attains full strength and reaches forty years of age, he says: ''My Lord, arouse me that I may give thanks for the favor that You have granted me and my parents, and that I may do right unto You. And be gracious to me in the matter of my progeny.''
>
> (Qur'an 46:15)

The Arabic phrase, *wahnan 'ala wahnin,* found in Qur'an 31:14, which has been translated as ''weakness upon weakness'' has a fuller meaning,

which the commentators have attempted to describe. Tabari says it means weakness upon weakness, and straining upon straining. Qatada says it is effort upon effort, and thus Ibn Kathir comments that the Most High mentions the mother's rearing of the child and tiring herself, and her hardship staying awake night and day, in order to remind the child of her previous kindness to him. Qurtubi says it refers to the period in which she carried him in pregnancy, and she increased each day in weakness upon weakness. Muhammad Siddiq Khan summarizes in his statement: "It is said that pregnancy is *wahn*, the labor pains are *wahn*, and the delivery is *wahn*, and the nursing is *wahn*."[2] Then, in reference to *ilayya al-masir* ("unto Me is the journey"), Ibn Kathir says that the meaning is that Allah will give an abundant reward for giving thanks to your parents.[3] Sufyan Ibn 'Uyaina adds that he who prays the five prayers has thereby given thanks to Allah, the Most High, and he who makes *du'a* (a prayer of supplication) for his parents after his prayers has thereby given thanks to them.[4]

The Hadith explains the importance of the mother's task and the great reward she receives:

> Anas ibn Malik narrated: Salama, the nurse of [the Prophet Muhammad's] son Ibrahim, said to the Prophet, "Oh Messenger of Allah, you brought tidings of all good things to men but not to women." [The Prophet] said, "Did your women friends put you up to asking me this question?" She said, "Yes, they did." He said, "Does it not please any one of you that if a woman is pregnant by her husband and he is satisfied with her that she receives the reward of one who fasts and prays for the sake of Allah? When the labor pains come, no one in Heaven or on Earth knows what is concealed in her womb to soothe her. When she delivers, not a mouthful of milk flows from her and not an instance of the child's suck, but that she receives, for every mouthful and for every suck, the reward of one good deed. And if she is kept awake by her child at night, she receives the reward of one who frees seventy slaves for the sake of Allah."[5]

Because of the strong bond of affection that accompanies the great effort of the mother, the loss of children is a heavy burden, and if she accepts it as Allah's will, her reward is Paradise:

> The women said to the Prophet Muhammad: "Oh Messenger of Allah, the men have taken all your time from us, so give us a day with you." So he promised them a day. He preached to them and commanded them and amongst what he told them was: "There is not one of you that sends forth (in death) three of your children, but that this will protect her from the Fire." One woman asked, "Oh Messenger of Allah, what about two?" He replied, "And two."[6]

In another hadith the Prophet said, "Not one of you will have three children to die and accept it (as the will of Allah), but that she will enter Paradise." Then he added "Or two."[7] In addition, if the mother dies in childbirth, she is equal to the martyr who dies fighting in the cause of Allah.

'Ubada ibn al-Samit narrated (in a longer hadith): "A woman who dies in childbirth together with the baby, becomes a martyr."[8]

In Qur'an 46:15 above, the accusative noun *karhan* has been translated as "with reluctance." To further clarify this point, Tabari refers to the statements of Mujahid, Hasan (al-Basri), and Qatada that *karhan* means hardship, labor, and trouble. He goes on, in his interpretation of the verse, to say that the age of 40 years is when Allah has given man maturity and competence; the folly of youth has passed and he knows his duties to Allah and what is right in terms of respect to his parents.[9] Thus, Tabari indicates that a human being does not reach the state of full awareness of his mother's great efforts exerted on his behalf, until he or she has fully experienced the stage of parenthood himself.

Both Tabari and Qurtubi mention that verse 46:15 was revealed for Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (d. 634 CE, the first successor to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community). According to (the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law) 'Ali (d. 661 CE), both of Abu Bakr's parents became Muslims. This did not happen in any of the families of the *Muhajirin,* except that of Abu Bakr; thus, Allah advised him about his parents, and this became obligatory on all Muslims afterward.[10]

The last part of Qur'anic verse 46:15 means, "Make my descendents pious; make them successful in doing good works so that You may be satisfied with them."[11] This provides a guideline for the mother in her responsibility of rearing her children. The Hadith clarifies her role of providing her children with religious knowledge, piety, good conduct, and morals. In addition, a mother must discipline her children and teach them obedience. At the same time, she should be a good companion to them—sharing, understanding, and generous. One very important factor in child rearing is the equal treatment of children.

Ibn 'Abbas narrated that the Prophet said: "Pronounce as the first words to your children, 'There is no God but Allah,' and recite to them at death, 'There is no God but Allah.'"[12] The Prophet's wife 'A'isha narrated that the Prophet said: "Allah will not call to account the person who brings up a small child such that he says, 'There is no God but Allah.'"[13]

Ibn 'Umar narrated that the Prophet said: "What does a parent leave as an inheritance for his child that is better than good morals?"[14] Anas ibn Malik narrated that the Prophet said: "Be generous to your children, and excel in teaching them the best of conduct."[15] Ibn 'Abbas narrated that the Prophet said: "There is no Muslim, whose two daughters reach the age (of maturity), and he is good to them as a companion, that do not cause him to enter Paradise."[16] Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet said: "Set your children's eyes on piety; whoever wants to can purge disobedience from his child."[17] Jabir ibn Samra narrated that the Prophet said: "If one of you disciplines his child it is better for you than if you give half a *sa'* (a measure of grain equivalent to a large basket) in charity to a poor person."[18]

Ibn Qayyim discusses the matter of children's obedience in the context of explaining the Qur'anic verse: ''Oh you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire'' (Qur'an 66:6). He includes a statement of 'Ali: ''Teach them and train them in good conduct.'' He also mentions a statement by al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 CE): ''Command them with obedience to Allah and teach them what is good.'' Then, he mentions the following hadith, which he says describes three kinds of moral conduct. 'Amr ibn Shu'ayb narrated on the authority of his father, on the authority of his grandfather, who said: The Messenger of Allah said: ''Order your children to pray at seven, beat them about it at ten, and in sleeping separate them.''[19]

The final counsel is that of equal treatment of children: al-Nu'man ibn Bashir narrated that the Prophet said, ''Fear Allah and treat your children equally.''[20] In another narration the wife of Bashir said: ''Make a gift of your slave to my son and have the Messenger of Allah bear witness for me.'' Bashir went to the Messenger of Allah and said, ''The Daughter of So-and-So (that is, my wife) asked that I make a gift of my slave to her son and said, 'Have the Messenger of Allah bear witness for me.''' Then [the Prophet] said, ''Does your wife's son have any brothers?'' ''Yes,'' Bashir said. ''Have you given to each of them the like of that which you gave to him?'' asked the Prophet. ''No,'' he said. Then the Prophet said: ''This is not fair. I do not bear witness except to what is just.''[21]

Ibn Qayyim argues that unequal treatment of children is morally forbidden (*haram*), based on the Prophet's refusal to bear witness in the above hadith, and on the fact that he said three times, ''Treat your children equally,'' thus making equal treatment a required duty (*wajib*).[22]

In summary, although in Islam there are many ways to open the doors of Paradise, the vehicles especially chosen for the woman are those of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and the conscientious rearing of her children. The commentaries clearly point out the great effort and struggle these involve. However, for every ounce of effort exerted in this direction—be it physical, emotional, or mental—the mother is elevated to a higher position of esteem in the eyes of her family and society and has thereby gained a place for herself amongst the successful in the Hereafter.

NOTES

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1. 'Ala' al-Din ibn Husam al-Din al-Hindi, *Kanz al-'umal fi sunan al-aqwal* (Hyderabad, India: Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyya, 1364/1945), vol. 16, 271 (hadith no. 44,403).

2. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 3rd printing, 1388/1968), vol. 21, 69; 'Imad al-Din Abi'l-Fida' Isma'il Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim* (Cairo: Dar al-Qutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d.), v. 3, 445; Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li-ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi li-al-Taba' wa al-Nashr, 1387/1967), vol. 14, 64; Muhammad Siddiq Khan, *Husn al-Uswa bi-ma thabita min Allah wa Rasulihi fi al-niswa* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Risala, 1976), 159.

3. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'azim,* vol. 3, 445.

4. Qurtubi, *al-Jami',* vol. 14, 65.

5. Ismail Abdul Razack and Abdul Jawad al-Banna, *Women and Family in the Sunnah of the Prophet* (Arabic text included), International Centre for Population Studies and Research, Al-Azhar University (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, n.d.), 15.

6. *Sahih Muslim* (Cairo: 1924) vol. 16, 181; see also, Khan, *Husn al-uswa,* 471 and 392.

7. *Sahih Muslim,* 1924, 181.

8. Khan, *Husn al-uswa,* 493; according to Nawawi, Malik ibn Anas in the *Muwatta* includes a hadith that the martyrs are seven, one of which is the mother who dies in childbirth, i.e., together with her child. See *Sahih Muslim bi-sharh al-Nawawi* (Cairo: 1924), vol. 13, 62–63.

9. Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan,* vol. 16, 15–17.

10. The *Muhajirin* were the emigrants from Mecca who came with the Prophet Muhammad to Medina in 622 CE. (Ed.)

11. Qurtubi, *al-Jami',* vol. 16, 194; see also, Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan,* vol. 16, 17.

12. Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tuhfat al-mawdud bi-ahkam al-mawlud* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qima, 1977), 176.

13. Hindi, *Kanz al-'umal,* vol. 16, 456 (hadith no. 45,408).

14. Ibid., 460 (hadith no. 45,435).

15. Ibid., 456 (hadith no. 45,410).

16. Ibid., 448 (hadith no. 45,370).

17. Ibid., 457 (hadith no. 45,419).

18. Ibid., 461 (hadith no. 45,438); see also, Ibn Qayyim, *Tuhfat al-mawdud,* 176.

19. Ibn Qayyim, *Tuhfat al-mawdud,* 176; see also, *Sunan Abi Dawud,* vol. 1, 51.

20. Hindi, *Kanz al-'umal,* vol. 16, 445 (hadith no. 45,353); *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 11, 67; see also, Ibn Qayyim, *Tuhfat al-mawdud,* 178. In the version given by Ibn Al-Qayyim, the command "Treat your children equally" is repeated three times.

21. *Sahih Muslim,* 69. In another narration, the Messenger of Allah said: "Then get someone else to bear witness for this." See also, Abu Zakariyya Yahya al-Nawawi, *Riyad al-Salihin* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 433.

22. See Ibn Qayyim, *Tuhfat al-mawdud,* 178–179. Nawawi adds that equal treatment includes equal treatment of both girls and boys. However, he considers a breach of equal treatment as *makruh* (disapproved but not forbidden). Concurring with Nawawi's opinion are the jurists Shafi'i, Malik, and Abu Hanifa. See Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim bi-sharh al-Nawawi,* vol. 11, 66–67.

7

The Birth of Aliya Maryam

Seemi Bushra Ghazi

Gracious are the gardens in which in winter
New fruits ripen for every Mary

—Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

My lineage goes back to Adam (upon him be peace). In this respect, I am no different from anyone. I read once in a family manuscript, flowing in rivulets of elegant *nastaliq* script, about the threads of reputed origin, Prophets, scholars, pilgrims, and holy men, who moved from Yemen to Yathrib (present-day Medina) before the coming of Islam, who hosted the Prophet at their table in Medina, and arrived in India soon after the first Arab merchants. There they dispersed, taught, and preached, and established religious schools or *madrasas*. When I think of these men in my father's family as I encountered them in visits to India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, they bore no resemblance to the wild-eyed mullahs of CNN with their hateful small-time religion. My "uncles" seemed powerful and delicate, majestic and fluid, with features of perfect Chinese brushwork and the poise of the blue heron on our shoreline at low tide.

The shoreline where my family and I live is the coast of British Columbia, where a renegade tropical current moderates the frigid Pacific as it narrows into the Burrard Inlet entering the city of Vancouver. It is a long way from the steppes of my Central Asian forebears, the dry riverbeds of Yemen, the mustard fields of Haryana. It is far even from the London of my birth, and the Boston and Chicago of my childhood. Mostly it is far from the cities that had always seized my imagination—Damascus, Cairo, Istanbul. I arrived here nine years ago wondering how it came to be that this ancient soul had been flung out onto the furthest rim of the newest world.

It was a question but not a complaint. I'd been forbidden complaint by my Turkish spiritual master, Sherif Baba, who, at the least sign of lament in any of his dervish students, would kiss whatever garment he happened to be wearing and sing, " I like my shirt," a reminder of the Prophet Muhammad's

teaching, *Alhamdulillah 'ala kulli hal,* "Praise belongs to Allah in every situation and spiritual state." Far then from Mecca and the shrines of our holy ones, I resolved to sanctify the life in which I found myself, making pilgrimage through urban blackberry thickets to the wild beach at Kitsilano and probing the shifting mandala of the Mary blue Pacific. Black and azure, grey and gold—the North Shore Mountains became my Layla, both veiled and revealed by the courtship of sunlight and cloud. With many pasts surging together, I sought presence here in nature and tried to imagine a future worthy of our ancient aspirations.

Here I will recite the Sura of Maryam (Qur'an 19), the Qur'anic chapter devoted to Mary the Blessed Virgin. Somewhere in Cairo, a friend is in labor. Her mother e-mailed me last night, "Pray for a safe delivery." Earlier in her pregnancy, in the months of gestation, I had recited the Sura of Yusuf (Qur'an 12), praying that her daughter might grow beautifully in the womb, as the young Prophet Joseph grew in the well and in the crucible of his prison cell, refined in inner and outer qualities—exquisite and visionary, a king. But by now, my friend's baby has known both union and separation, the coming together of her parents' seed and the myriad delicate divisions that gave rise to her form. We prayed for her formation for four months, but now her gestation is complete. As her journey to this world begins, we read especially of Maryam, her noble birth to a priestly lineage, her long devotions in the sanctuary, and the strange and poignant Qur'anic tale of her labor and birth.

I have read this Sura countless times for aunts, cousins, sisters, and friends. Though we live continents apart, a woman feels the pangs of labor, neighbors knock, the phone rings, and e-mails appear out of ether. In Karachi, London, Chicago, and here too in Vancouver, women leave their occupations, draw about themselves the tabernacle of silken shawls, and sing the same sacred song, praying that divine compassion might envelope their sister as the date palm bowed over our Maryam, nourishing her endurance.

I have read the Sura of Maryam for my nieces and nephews with all their beautiful names. I have read it on a Pacific outcropping where eagles circled as Haniya (Joy) was born; I have read it flying across the continent toward little Isra (Night Journey) emerging one month too early. I have read it on a bunk bed flanked by my nephews, Idris and Ilyas, as we awaited the birth of their brother, Isa, the last of a trio of Japanese-Pakistani-Canadian lads named for the venerable apostles, Enoch, Elias, and Jesus. And just once, six years ago, I read it for myself.

I say "once," because I have recited the Sura of Yusuf for myself many, many times. Two years before my daughter's birth and three years afterward, I read it for a full trimester. Though the two sons I bore too early and then buried—one a finger's length of a boy, the other a delicate seahorse—did not linger long, in their brief sojourn they revealed to me Yusuf's perfect beauty. They chose themselves names in jest and then in earnest, Pir Ali and Ibrahim; scattered small miracles for their expectant mother like so many

red money packets at the Chinese New Year Parade; and cared for me even as they slipped away, announcing their departure and promising me protection. I folded them in white cotton, recited the Sura of Ya Sin for their passage, and buried them beneath daisies near the Coast Salish site at Jericho Beach. They appeared to me as six-year-olds, as teenagers, as young men. Once in a dream they stole upon me out at Spanish Banks, two strong sons who lifted me up, up by the arms like a girl, and ran laughing the length of the surf, Pir Ali with shining curls, gravity in mirth, and Ibrahim's dark eyes, mirth in gravity. Though briefly embodied, they made themselves known, rending the veil between the seen and the unseen and offering me so much of themselves and the world to which they were turning that I now fall silent, lest I transgress the boundaries of spiritual courtesy.

My daughter Aliya was another matter. She grew within me a full nine months but would not reveal herself. Sherif Baba cautioned us against speaking of her unnecessarily, and she assured our adherence to his guidance by eluding us entirely. In ultrasounds she turned away from the camera, briefly presenting one almond eye and then a pearl-strung languor of spine. The technicians, who had been charged with photographing the four chambers of her heart, suggested us to roll down the hospital greens to elicit her compliance. After 10 minutes of entertaining interns assembled under an arbor for a smoking break, I sat by a late blooming magnolia in conversation with my unborn daughter. "It is true that the chambers of your heart are no place for strangers to be probing, and I admire your discretion and clarity of will, both of which, God knows, I am lacking. Still, if you would indulge these people, it would save us both returning next week, by which time I intend to be well past somersaulting on public lawns." Minutes later, she turned just long enough to assure us of her heart's bivalve perfection. By the time I asked to see her face, she had sequestered herself again.

The first four months of my pregnancy with Aliya were not marked by wonder. I was nauseous, exhausted, and hypersensitive, with an animal sense of smell. I could not be in the remote vicinity of chicken or cologne. Though others assured me nothing had changed, the odors of municipal sewage seemed to permeate my home by way of the kitchen drain. At one point, I could not tolerate even the fragrance of my own clean skin. Then one morning I awoke and the sickness was over. Not having walked more than three blocks in that time, I announced to my bemused husband Osman that his child wished to go to the mountains. At Cathedral Lakes Provincial Park, which seemed to be 10,000 miles above Earth's northernmost desert, Osman and his friends hiked the advanced trails. My baby and I set out at our own pace, aided by a reliable walking stick. Together we traversed an improbable vista of rock scape, glacier, and alpine meadow. We stood, one foot on ancient ice and the other in a field of ephemeral bloom. I thought of Moses climbing Mt. Sinai, and of all who ascend. The scent of anguish fell away.

Perhaps here arose the seed of intention that brought us the name Aliya, "Raised High," or "Exalted."

Returning home, I was again afflicted, this time by insomnia. My mother, *Ammi,* had always retired early and arisen before dawn. As a girl, I awoke to the sonority of her morning devotions. God's breath in *Ammi's* breath called me before the first light. While my younger siblings slept, we shared the communion of dawn prayer, tea and toast with guava jelly, conversation, reading, and reflection. Even today, I relish the hours between 5:00 and 8:00 AM. But something was not letting me sleep until the hour when I usually arose. Though preferable to my previous nausea, sleep deprivation soon began to trouble my equanimity.

In the midst of this condition, I attended a celebration of the birth of the thirteenth-century poet and mystic Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. There I asked Sherif Baba whether he could suggest a prayer or divine name to alleviate my condition. He laughed, "Don't ask for sleep! The holy ones love the night. Perhaps the one within you is awakened. Bear with her. No frustration. Lie in bed peacefully and reflect upon whichever divine names and verses come into your heart." Late that night I left Osman sleeping and wandered out to a towering bonfire around which young dervishes were immersed in *dhikr,* the ceremony of divine remembrance. A woman beat a frame drum laced with iron rings. Their two faces flickered, woman and drum, golden moon skins shimmering with song. I sat on a bench with the *dhikr* around me, *Ya Jamal, ya Jalal,* Oh Beauty, Oh Majesty. *Ya Qabid, ya Basit, ya Hayy, ya Haqq.* Oh, Contractor of Hearts, oh Expander of Souls, oh Life and Vitality, oh You who are Real. *La ilaha illallahu. La ilaha illallahu.* There is no God but the one God (He). There is nothing but the One. *Hu, Hu,Hu, Hu.* I joined them on *Hu,* the breath of creation, remembering Allah's divine name *al-Rahman,* the creative womblike Compassion that exhaled a primordial and eternal *Hu,* warming and animating the damp clay of the original human being. I took that *Hu* home to my cabin and fell into a deep and restful slumber. Insomnia returned the next night and did not leave until Aliya was born, but my feelings about it had been transformed. I surrendered to the night's serenity, to intimate discourse with my unborn darling, and to a subtle presence that I had not experienced before, the presence of Hazrat Maryam.

Hazrat Maryam, Islam's "Noble Mary," was born into a priestly clan in the lineage of Aaron, Moses' brother. Her mother Hannah had promised to dedicate the child in her womb to the service of the Temple. That the child was born a daughter did not deter her. Under the spiritual mentorship of her Uncle Zakariyya, the young Maryam flourished.

Her Lord accepted her in beauty
And cultivated her in beauty,
Entrusting her to Zakariyya.
Whenever Zakariyya came upon her
In the *mihrab* (sanctuary),

> He found her blessed with sustenance.
> He said, "Maryam, whence comes this to you?"
> She said, "It is from Allah.
> Surely, Allah grants sustenance without measure to whomever He wills."
>
> (Qur'an 3:37)

I first noticed this verse 12 years ago. It was inscribed in Sherif Baba's fanciful hand on the door of his library. He nodded toward it and then toward me with a glance that said, "Pay attention." Over the years, it has shown me much about transmission between generations, between genders, between teachers and students, within families, and especially between God and human beings. Zakariyya offered Maryam a sanctuary and trusted her cultivation of her inner world. The physical sanctuary in this passage was Maryam's prayer niche located within the Jerusalem Temple, but the literal signification of the Arabic term *mihrab* is "a place of struggle or battle." Though we revere Maryam for her serenity, she engaged in a profound inward struggle without which her *mihrab,* as a site of inward battle, could not have become her *mihrab* as a site of sanctity and retreat. Through struggle Maryam became her own *mihrab,* "Maryam Full of Grace." One manifestation of this grace was the sustenance she received from Allah "without measure," a miraculous sustenance that Islamic traditions describe as the fruit of winter in summer and the fruit of summer in winter.

Zakariyya asks Maryam a question, "Whence comes this to you?" although as her elder and spiritual mentor he must have discerned the answer. He attended to her story and honored the fruit of her communion with the unseen, allowing it even to nourish his own spiritual trust. Despite Zakariyya's advancing years, he had been granted no son. Maryam's experiences moved him to return to the sanctuary and to pray to Allah for a child. There in the winter of old age, he received the promise of summer's fruit: he would be blessed with a holy son named Yahya (John). This son, John the Baptist, would later foretell the birth of Maryam's own son Isa (Jesus), a fruit of summer conceived and borne in the winter of Maryam's maidenhood. Once, I asked a group of women, "What if we were to regard these verses as a promise?" What if Mary's daughters and sons were promised that whenever we turned to the sanctuary, we would be blessed beyond season? Does it ever happen that we turn from the merely incidental to the most sacrosanct place within, without receiving some immeasurable gift?

Lying awake in my bedroom sanctuary, I began to meditate on silence and night. I knew that when Zakariyya had received word of the birth of Yahya, the Angel Gabriel granted him a sign: that he should not speak to any human being for three *layali,* three nights, except in signs (Qur'an 19:10). I also recalled hearing in childhood of young Maryam's nocturnal devotions, and how she too had received angelic guidance and "fasted" a time from speaking

(Qur'an 19:26). In quiet solitude, I began to imagine nights that I called *Layali Maryam,* nights that Maryam had devoted to prayer, meditation, and fasting. I entered each *Layla,* each single Night: *Layla* of Mystery, *Layla* of Union, Moon *Layla, Layla* of Seventy Unveilings, *Layla* of Shining Constellations, and strangest of all, the *Layla/*Night when the *Ruh,* the Divine spirit, breathed into Maryam the baby Isa (Jesus), a child conceived like the first human being, Adam, of sheer Divine desire. (As the Qur'an tells it, Allah commanded, *Kun fa yakun,*"Be! And it was.")

With my daughter now dancing within her own sanctuary, brushing her wings against my womb and sending me delicate butterfly epigrams, I touched the improbability of human development. That any child should be conceived and thrive, and then emerge living for even one breath, became no less remarkable to me than the virgin conception of Isa.

> She conceived him and withdrew to a distant place.
> The birth pangs drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said,
> "I wish I had died and were forgotten!"
> A voice called to her from below, "Grieve not. Your lord has placed a stream below you.
> Sway the trunk of the tree toward you. Ripe dates will shower down.
> Eat and drink, and be comforted. If you meet anyone, say, I have consecrated a fast to the Compassionate and cannot speak today to any human being."
>
> (Qur'an, *Maryam* 19:22–26)

Aliya began to enter this world on December 17, 1999. That evening we had gathered in the Quaker Friends Meeting Hall to celebrate the *Urs,* "Wedding," or death anniversary of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. I lay on a narrow wooden pew, as around us dervishes in ethereal white whirled the dance of the cosmos and the soul's rebirth. Right hand raised, they sought grace, with left hand lowered in offering. They spun on the axis of the left foot, centered in the heart and in divine unity, but with the right foot turned to embrace all directions, all creation. I had been asked to recite Qur'an and perhaps lead the chanting at the conclusion of the ceremony but doubted my ability to do anything at all. And yet when the music suddenly stopped, as the dervishes folded up their flowering forms, I sat up and recited the Sura of *Qadr* (Qur'an 97), the Chapter of Divine Power. This Sura invokes *Laylat al-Qadr,* the Night of Power, destiny, and value, on which the Qur'an was first revealed. It is a night "better than a thousand months," an angelic night pregnant with spirit, a night of "peace until the rising of dawn" (Qur'an 97:3–5). Afterward, we invoked God's 99 names and I sang Rumi's Persian poem, "Come, come my sweet heart, come into all that I do. You, you are my garden. Whisper my innermost secret. Come, come my dervish. Do not leave my side. You, you are my own tress, you are my very self." I arrived home near midnight and began to feel my daughter's descent.

When Hazrat Maryam came to this moment, the Temple could no longer shelter her. She had conceived a child with no father and risked the opprobrium of her people. Young, unprepared, and utterly alone, "she conceived him and withdrew to a distant place" (Qur'an 19:22). I thought of her solitude as my pains increased and beautiful companions joined me. I had let Osman sleep to gain strength for the next day, but he awoke early, sparkling with vitality and goodwill. *Ammi* arrived in the afternoon on the first flight from Chicago. She had been reading the Sura of Maryam on the plane and disembarked to blow its blessings thrice over my body as we lingered near the baggage claim in International Arrivals. Her eyes told me that she would not cease until I had safely delivered her grandchild. Later I was joined by three women whom I had thought of as wise Sherpa guides. They would lead me, share my burdens, and teach me how to breathe in the thin, high altitudes of labor.

The first was Jackie, our *doula* or birthing companion. She had met Osman and me twice during the pregnancy and had helped us reflect on how we should experience this event. Mostly, I knew that I wished to be present and conscious to experience each moment of the journey and greet our child, clear-eyed and fully aware. Who would she be at the moment when she arrived? What would I become? I wanted to share a first glance unmediated by any sedative. I called Jackie on the afternoon of December 18th to say that I was still at ease, despite riding the waves of suffering and relief. An hour later, Osman phoned again, urging Jackie to come quickly. As soon as she arrived, Jackie filled the bathtub and crouched beside me all night. When the hot water ran out, Osman boiled some more, running back and forth like a midwife's apprentice in some earlier century. I must have fallen asleep before sunrise, for when I awoke I found that someone had carried me from the bathtub to the bed. How long had I been unconscious? Five minutes? Five hours? Jackie lay sleeping on the floor.

My friend Lou arrived later that morning in a penumbra of red-gold curls. Once a nurse in rural Newfoundland, skilled in low-tech labor support, she was now an anthropologist, psychologist, and harpist. One day I said to her, " Lou if I get to that point in labor where I can't continue, I think I will be alright if I can just look into your eyes." Now her eyes held my gaze and her body held my form, moving together in the Tai Chi of "Love your baby down." I shuddered through each season of pain, too much now and too long, and Lou absorbed it, sloughed it off, and filled me with her melodic light. My child would not descend. Why? Was an elbow askew? Was her chin in her palm? We wound up the Hawaiian music box my brother had brought back from his honeymoon and swayed with the mechanical hula girl as I wept, "Come down, baby, please come down." In Jackie's notes she says that *Ammi* approached me around this time saying, *Beti, Allah se bhi maango,* "Darling, also ask Allah." "You ask Allah, Mum, please. Talk to Allah. Right now I need to talk to my baby."

By the time Dr. Rachael arrived, the labor had been going on for 36 hours. She knelt beside me, "How are we?" I remember saying, "This is hard now, Rachael, really very hard." Rachael was an advocate for midwives and home birth. She could not recall the last time she had needed a knife and a needle. Rather than telling women to push, she urged, "Love your baby down," and called her work "catching," not "delivering" babies. I knew the first moment I had met her that I wanted her to "catch" mine. Though Rachael was herself five months pregnant, she had dropped in on her Sunday off just to see how I was doing.

A woman must open for a child to be born, open in every possible way. Medically, it is said, she must open 10 centimeters. After 36 hours of labor, I anticipated success, but somehow the examination revealed otherwise. "You have not yet begun to dilate," said Rachael, "there are 10 centimeters to go." My heart fell—after all that time! (Women are expected to dilate one centimeter per hour.) "But you are fully effaced," Rachael added, "That's the hardest part. You've done remarkably well." Rather than noting my failure to progress, Rachael offered her dazzling approval and made me feel like a hero.

Rachael felt confident that in Jackie's care we could continue to labor at home, but upon phoning the hospital we learned that a room had just opened in a new ward called Cedar where mothers could labor, deliver, and recover all in one suite. I had seen the windowless delivery rooms in the old basement wards and felt certain that I would feel caged and claustrophobic there. Cedar had spacious windows, pullout beds, endless hot water, and room for all of my companions. Room 7 was available and I did not want to lose it. How long would it take to get there? With green lights all the way and one red light on Broadway—two and a half contractions.

At one point, while preparing our birth plan I had become self-conscious. Women give birth every day in challenging circumstances. Why was I walking, swimming, and meditating? Why did I need five companions? Was this not self-absorption? Then one morning before dawn prayer, I dreamt of myself within a vast tent, a circular tent of white skins. The skins were supported by four peripheral poles and one great central pole. Smoke ascended skyward through an opening in the roof. Waking, I knew with certainty: the four "poles" were Osman, Jackie, Rachael, and Lou. Without each one of them, the tent would collapse. The central pole was *Ammi,* her unceasing recitations opening up to Hazrat Maryam. At first, labor would be like ascending a mountain, later like plunging into a burning sea, but *Ammi* would blow into me the presence of Maryam. Without each one of them, my will would fall into absence. Without each one of them, my baby would not be released.

At first, I bore the surge and the retreat. I called upon the divine names *Al Qabid, Al Basit,* "Contractor, Expander, grip and release me, draw this being from my being, let this child be born!" As the storm rose, so too did

my endurance. The women told me, "Other pain is a signal of warning and danger, but not this pain. This pain is safe; it is the pain of creation, and you are safe with us." Somehow, this made a crucial difference. I feared the sensation of pain, but I never feared that it would harm me. I loved its work and its effect. The women knew these contours of the ocean, islands of respite, and depths of the sky. I shivered, trembled, and cried out. They embraced me in the ceramic hospital tub, pouring warm water down my spine. They would not let the ark of my body shatter on any reef.

I have read that even elephants give birth like this—elephant *doulas* and midwives stroking their elephant sisters, murmuring secrets remembered from ancient elephant times. Here is an elephant secret: at the height of labor, in a time called "transition," a time of vomiting, terror, and delirium, if a woman is held and comforted she can fall into a restorative sleep in the single minute between contractions. I had been awake more than 40 hours. Now, I slid to the bottom of an ocean, slept with strange aquatic angels, waking and slumbering, conscious and gone. Lou and Jackie sailed my body back and forth in their arms. My baby swam down, down, finally engaged.

Aliya did not want to be born in water, and I wanted strength beneath my feet. I crouched on the linoleum floor. Glancing up, the hospital bed seemed as remote and unstable as scaffolding or aerial wire. The urge to bear down became the most powerful instinct I had ever known, seven worlds thundering down into the depths of my abdomen. Though my friends surrounded me, I arrived at the place where Hazrat Maryam had begun and retreated into a wilderness where no one could find me. The Maryam who had arrived at this place was not the Queen of Heaven. She was a woman like every other woman—spirit, yes, but also flesh and blood, milk and bone. "The birth pangs drove her to the trunk of the palm tree" (Qur'an 19:23). She cried out in a voice so intimate, so colloquial, "I wish I had died and been forgotten!" It was the desire to become oblivion itself, to fall away traceless and unremembered. I could neither proceed nor retreat. *Ammi* had read the Sura of Maryam and blown its blessings over us unceasingly for one night and two days. In her murmuring, I heard the fugue of all my scattered kin. Sherif Baba would be reading from the Sura of "He Frowned" (Qur'an 80), "And then [God] eased the path" (Qur'an 80:20), but I knew now that nothing could ease this path. My child would never be born, nor would I survive. "I am dying now," I said, "I am going to die." I began to disappear but was drawn back by someone whispering, "If you have seen the door of death, then you are ready to have this baby. No woman can give birth, Seemi, without witnessing that door." Then there was screaming, a body rent, and Rachael exclaiming, "What a sweet face!" and our small slippery daughter crying out in my arms.

A root grows in the hills outside of Medina. The Bedouin women harvest small bunches of it and bring it to the graveyards of the Muslim martyrs. *Ammi* remembers it from her Indian childhood. The Hajj pilgrims would

return from Mecca on great wooden ships, disembarking to garlands of marigold, jasmine, and rose. In return, they offered their loved ones vials of healing *Zam Zam* water and bunches of the root known as *Panja-e Maryam*, "Mary's Fist." They said that this same root grew in the hills near Bethlehem and that Maryam grasped it when she was overcome by birth pangs. *Ammi's* aunts used to soak it in a bowl of water until it was soft and grasped it in their own labors, calling upon Hazrat Maryam to stand by them in their pain.

My sister Saba had bought two Fists of Mary at the graveyard of Badr near Medina when she was but 12 and I was 17. Since then, they had accompanied her to Chicago, New York, and North Carolina. She used one root for the birth of her children and the other she saved for me. She told me how she had watched the "fist" unfold in her first labor, gradually tinting the water a delicate amber color. I too witnessed those deepening hues, and held the root in my hand, folding Maryam's strength within mine, sending *salaams* to her spirit.

Two nights and days had passed striving to give birth to Aliya. Night had come once again before she was finally born. It was December 19, 1999, the eleventh night of Ramadan, two hours before yet another midnight. As the postpartum nurses settled our daughter to rest, I turned to the glass bowl at my bedside and glanced at the Fist of Maryam, still floating carnelian and serene. Once gnarled, desiccated, and closed, it had slowly unfolded and softened in the animating medium of water. The fist had become a pliant hand, and now after 48 hours, it revealed something that no one had intimated. The root of Maryam had traveled from its ancient home to my daughter's land and become a tentative garden. On this, our last *Layla* together, Maryam's palm opened, offering green leaf and blossom.

8

Even at Night the Sun is There: Illness as a Blessing from God

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

A few years ago I was living in an English village outside Cambridge while researching my doctorate and working with the Islamic Texts Society, an academic organization that publishes important works from the Islamic heritage after having them translated into English.

One evening, as I reached to switch off the bedside lamp, I noticed that my arm would not stretch out to do so. In fact, I found I was not able to pull the blankets up about me except by using my teeth; neither arm seemed to function. When I tried to take a deep breath, it seemed as though my lungs were incapable of expansion. At the approach of a cough or a sneeze, I held my arms closely around my chest for fear the sudden and painful expansion of my breast would rip me apart. When I arose the next morning, the only way to get out of bed was to hang my knees over the edge and slide off since my upper torso had become powerless. I could not even raise my arms to brush my hair. Turning on the bathroom faucet was an excruciating affair. By holding the bottom of the steering wheel in my fingertips, I was able to drive to the village clinic. The doctor concluded I had some type of virus for which there was no treatment other than time.

A day or so later, my husband and I were to fly to Boston for the annual congress of the Middle East Studies Association. I viewed my affliction as an inconvenience that would ultimately pass and decided to ignore my condition. I noticed, however, that on the day we were to leave England, I began to have trouble walking, and getting upstairs was extremely difficult. By the time we reached the hotel room in Boston, more and more of my system seemed to be shutting down. I could no longer write or hold a teacup, bite anything as formidable as an apple, dress myself, or even get out of a chair unless assisted. Everything ached. I could not move my head in the direction of the person I was speaking to; I looked straight ahead, perhaps seeing them from the corner of my eyes.

Friends gave all kinds of advice that I simply shrugged off. The worst part was lying in bed at night. It was impossible to roll onto either side, and my whole body felt on fire with pain. It was terrible to have to lie flat, unable to make any shift whatsoever all night long. I thought to myself, "If only I could scratch my cheek when it itched, if only my eyes were not dry but cool, if only I could swallow without it feeling like a ping-pong-sized ball of pain, if only I could reach for a glass of water when thirsty during the long night!"

As we traveled on for work in New York, I continued to make light of my infirmity and to ignore suggestions that I seek help. On the plane, however, when it was necessary to ask the flight attendant to tear open a paper sugar packet for my tea, I suddenly realized, "I can't even tear a piece of paper!" I requested that a wheelchair await me in New York and that I be transferred to a flight home to my parents in Louisville, Kentucky. Since my husband was obliged to stay in New York, a kind soldier returning to Fort Knox helped me during that leg of the trip. I felt like a wounded fox that wanted nothing more than to return to, and curl up alone in, the nest of its childhood. My father met me at the airport and the next day he took me for every test imaginable. Nothing was conclusively established—was this rheumatoid arthritis, or lupus? I was brought to my parents' house and at last put in my childhood bed with a supply of painkillers, which I was not inclined to take. Since I found I could tolerate great pain, I wanted to observe the situation and know where I stood. I started seeing my body as a separate object and my mind passively witnessed its ever-declining condition. When my legs finally "went," with my knees swollen like grapefruits and my feet incapable of bearing me up, I mused with detached interest, "Oh, there go the legs!" The body seemed to be mine, but it was not *me*.[1] Later that night *it* happened. As I lay gazing out of my bedroom door and noticed the carpet in the quiet hall, I thought, "Thank God I'm not in a hospital and the hall is not linoleum and that I am not subjected to the clatter of ice machines and the chatter of nurses. I know I'm in trouble and I do need help, but *that* would be too great a cost for my soul."

A few moments later, I became aware that I seemed to be solidifying, my body had stiffened and seemed to be very much like a log: I was totally paralyzed. Then, I seemed to separate from my body and lift a distance above it. I glanced back and saw my head on the pillow and thought, "This is remarkable. I've read about this kind of thing. *I* am thinking but my brain is down there in my head! I must be *dead*." I considered what to do. When death comes in Islam, the dying person repeats the *Shahada:* "There is no divinity except God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

As I thought of the phrase, *La ilaha illa Allah* (There is no divinity except God), I seemed to be pulled back toward my heart, as if by a thread of light. However, there I was—quite all right in many ways, but utterly rigid and still.

The light of the moon comforted me as it passed through the leafless November branches, making patterns on the blankets. I thought, "Even at night, the Sun is there. Even in darkness and death, light and life are present." The fall season seemed to parallel my state.

Then I began to think about my future. I have friends who are paralyzed and who have always been placed along the sidelines for various events. Had I now joined them? Was I now out of the normal life of others? I began to see myself like a hunchback or a dwarf. I had always been known for my inexhaustible energy and activities. I could always, somehow, get to my feet and do one more thing. This was now over. I would no longer be able to *do* anything. I thought of people in this world who have impressed me most —the Mother Theresas of our world. I realized that what was exemplary in these people was not what they *did,* but what they *were;* the state of *being* that determined their movement was what actually inspired others. So I set upon a plan of inward action: The best thing I could do for others would be to sanctify my soul, to let my state of being become radiant. Having concluded this, I felt things were in order.

In the morning I was found, fixed in place; I was given eggnog through a straw—chewing was over. My husband came from New York and I recall marveling when I observed him. He could, without considering the matter in depth, shift his position in a chair, scratch his forehead, or lean over to pick up a dropped pencil—all painlessly! Imagine—reflex action! Occasionally, if I really wanted to move my fingers, for example, I would think to myself, "All right, now, I-am-going-to-try-to-move-my-fingers," and I would concentrate my entire attention on the task. With incredible pain and focus, I could at most shift a few millimeters. It struck me profoundly that when someone is able to move in this world without pain—that is, in health—that person has a foretaste of Paradise on Earth without ever being aware of it. Everything after that is extra.

Ultimately, it was decided that I should be given a week's course of cortisone so I could return to my children and the English specialist who might be able to figure out what I had. The cortisone was miraculous and frightening. I could actually walk and pick up things, yet I knew that I could not do this under normal conditions.

On my return to Cambridge, in order to speed up the blood tests, the doctor asked that I be removed overnight from the cortisone. I then discovered what withdrawal symptoms are—a level of pain that seems to consume one alive with fire. But the pain was nothing compared to the frightening mental confusion I experienced: I could not grasp proper thinking, or even normal reality. What I needed was not only a doctor but also a kind of scholar/saint who could describe to me the hierarchy of meaning in everyday reality, so that I would not be so painfully lost. I suppose true doctors are a combination of all three. The Islamic physician/philosopher was called a *hakim* (a sage or possessor of wisdom, *hikma*). I grasped

some rosaries and clung to them like lifelines thrown to a drowning man, and I made it to the light of dawn on the invocation of God's Name, my sanity intact.

The English specialist could not make a conclusive diagnosis. Our Vietnamese acupuncturist suggested that toxins had built up in my entire muscular and nervous system and prescribed massage during steam baths to release them. This sounded definitely worth doing. However, at the same time, I had come to that point that the very ill always come to, where, although they take advice with gratitude, inside of them something has dimmed and they no longer wish to make any effort. Pleasantly, I had reached a great calm within. Each day I was brought downstairs, where I directed the preparation of meals and worried the children, who saw I could no longer sew on a button or sign a check. I was resigned to never moving again. I had never experienced such peace. It was touching to see that people prayed for me and it was lovely that so many asked after my condition. I felt like an upright pole stuck in the middle of a moving stream.

In the spring, my husband had work to do in Arabia and suggested that as he would be traveling by private plane, I could just as easily sit in a dry climate as I could in cold, damp Cambridge. I agreed to go. On my arrival, a dear friend managed to get me to Mecca because she thought that prayers in the mosque there would help. But when I found myself before the Ka'ba, I felt it would be wrong to pray that my affliction would be lifted, as its good had come to outweigh its bad, in terms of my heart and soul.

A few days later, I was asked to give a talk in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. I declined, explaining that I was unable to research and prepare a topic properly. Friends said they would be delighted to do this for me, if I could come up with a subject. I answered, "All right, why does this Job-like trial happen to a person, in the view of Islam?" The passages they wrote down and translated into English from both the Qur'an and the Hadith—the sayings and recorded deeds of the Prophet Muhammad—all seemed to say the same thing. In Islam, illness is understood to be a great blessing. This is because it is an opportunity, if borne with patience and freedom from complaint, to purity oneself of past sins and burn away wrong thoughts and deeds.

As I delivered my talk, it began to dawn upon me why Muslims always reply with *Al-Hamdulillah* ("All praise belongs to God," the same as *Alleluia*) whenever anyone inquires as to their health. I had always wondered why one could ask someone who suffered from an obviously terrible physical or emotional pain or loss, "How *are* you?" and all one could get out of such a person was, "All praise belongs to God." I wanted them to talk about their pain with me, to share their suffering, and wondered why they would not do so. Suddenly, I realized that they were praising God for their state of being!

The suffering they endured, no matter how great, was an opportunity to be purified, which is the very aim of human existence. In an instant, I saw my own illness in a new light. I no longer patiently tolerated it—I *loved* it, I *flowed with it*. I saw how blessed I was to have been given not something small, but something as total as paralysis.

As I began to love my illness, my fingers began to regain movement. Bit by bit the movement in my hands returned, until at last in late spring, I was restored. What had been the most painful and difficult time in my life turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened to me. I had gained a deepened perspective, a sense of proportion and freedom. God had blessed me with near total dependence on others, a symbol reminding me of my utter dependency on Him. Even when I had not been able to move one inch, I was able to be in touch with His Divine Presence. This generous lesson from Allah taught me to say ''yes'' and to love whatever He wills for me, now and always.

(The illness described above was later diagnosed as Guillaume-Barre Syndrome.)

O God, to Thee belongs praise for the
Good health of my body, which lets
Me move about, and to Thee belongs
Praise for the ailments which Thou causes to arise in my flesh!
For I know not, my God, which of the
Two states deserves more my thanking
Thee and which of the two times is more worthy for my praise of Thee:
The time of health,
Within which Thou makest me delight
In the agreeable things of Thy
Provision, through which Thou givest
Me the joy to seek the means to Thy
Good pleasure and bounty, and by
Which Thou strengthenest me for the
Acts of obedience which Thou hast given me to accomplish;
Or the time of illness,
Through which Thou puttest me to
The test and bestowest upon me favors:
Lightening the offenses that weigh
Down my back, purifying the
Evil deeds into which I have plunged,
Inciting me to reach for repentance,
Reminding me of the erasure of misdeeds
Through ancient favor; and, through
All that the two writers write for me.[2]

From Imam Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (d. 712 CE), Great-Grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, *al-Sahifa al-kamila al-sajjadiyya,* ''The Perfect Page of the Prayer-Carpet'' (Translated by William Chittick)

NOTES

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1. ''Islamic physicians saw the body of man as but an extension of his soul and closely related to both the spirit and the soul.... They envisaged the subject of medicine, namely man, to be related both inwardly through the soul and the spirit, and 'outwardly' through the grades of the macrocosmic hierarchy to the principle of cosmic manifestation itself. Whatever may have been the historical origins of Islamic Medicine, its principles cannot be understood save in the light of Islamic metaphysical and cosmological sciences.'' Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science* (London, U.K.: World of Islam Festival Publishing Co. Ltd, 1976), 159.

2. According to Islamic belief, there is an angel on either shoulder who records one's good and bad deeds.

9

Caring for the Ill in Islam

Kristin Zahra Sands

> God will say on the Day of Resurrection, "Oh child of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit me." [The child of Adam] says, "My Lord, how could I visit you when you are the Lord of all beings?" God says, "But didn't you know that my servant so-and-so was sick and yet you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found me present with him? Oh son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed me." [The child of Adam] says, "My Lord, how could I feed you when you are the Lord of all beings?" God says, "Didn't you know that my servant so-and-so asked you for food and you did not feed him? If you had given him food, you would have found that in my presence. Oh son of Adam, I was thirsty but you did not give me water." [The child of Adam] says, "My Lord, how could I give you water when you are the Lord of all beings?" He says, "My servant so-and-so asked you for water but you did not give it to him. If you had given him water, you would have found that in my presence."[1]

This dialogue between God and the human race, recorded in a divine saying or *hadith qudsi*,[2] can be read—and should be read—as an urgent reminder of our obligation to respond to the needs of others. However, the wording of the hadith hints at deeper issues and broader possibilities than conventional notions of duty. What happens at moments when we are called upon by others? Why do we often turn away from those in need of us? Sometimes, there is irritation at the interruption or fear of one's own dependencies. There is the fatigue that sets in when one is asked to give again and again. Alternatively, there is the self-satisfied pride that follows some small sacrifice, the patting of oneself on the back for what was not at all difficult to give. What does it mean to say that God is present with the ill, the hungry, and the thirsty, and that one could find that presence in responding to those in need?

My approach to this question draws upon two sources: the textual sources of Islam and personal experience. The primary textual sources I am relying on are the Qur'an and selections from the literature of Sufism, also referred to as mystical Islam.[3] The literature of classical Sufism is characterized not only by

its references to contemporaneous exegetical, theological, and legal discussions but also by its use of anecdotes and poems that express an ethical and emotional sensibility that is particularly suited to the topic at hand. This is *not* a chapter surveying practices of caring for the ill in Muslim societies. Instead, it is very much situated in my particular experience within a privileged middle-class and secular environment in North America. I care, along with my husband, for a daughter with spina bifida, hydrocephalus, and epilepsy, conditions that have led to a broad range of chronic, pervasive, and difficult challenges as well as acute emergencies. Our experiences, although profoundly personal, have also necessarily involved repeated in-depth encounters with the services of outside professionals and private and public institutions. These encounters have led me to question the relationship between private beliefs and the organizational structures of a community, particularly the secular assumption that beliefs and institutions can be separated. The issues addressed here, then, are as much about private faith as they are about the relationship between that faith and action in the world.[4]

THE SHOCK

> We hurl truth against falsehood and it smashes out its brains; suddenly, falsehood is nothing.
>
> (Qur'an 21:18)[5]

The usual resting state of my consciousness consists of a carefully maintained bubble, within which a sense of entitlement to comfort and ease exists in tension with a gnawing fear of loss. One of these imagined "losses" materialized six months into my second pregnancy, when a sonogram uncovered the fact that the child I was carrying had a significant disability. The first idol to fall was the one that had assured me that I could predict and control events, if only I was willing to follow the rules—in this case, those of the healthy living required for a healthy pregnancy. Finding myself in the uncomfortable situation of needing help from strangers, I entered the foreign and complicated world of specialists in the medical profession, starting with a superior physician in a prestigious medical center. As I lay in his examining room experiencing my first internal sonogram, he stared at the image of my daughter's spine on the screen and exclaimed with excitement, "It's a very large defect!" Then he called in what seemed to be an entire class of medical students from the university to see it. No matter the indignities, I reassured myself—we were fortunate to be receiving the best medical care in the world. Sitting afterward in his office, the physician gave us a well-written, thorough report on his findings. Then he abruptly mentioned the stress that children with disabilities have on families and handed us a small

piece of paper with the name of someone who would perform what would have been an illegal abortion at that late date in the pregnancy. This was the first lesson of many for me that the qualities that support the long and arduous development of excellent physicians are not necessarily the same those one longs for in a highly fragile state. This is not to say that there are no doctors who combine rigorously practiced medicine with sensitivity to their patients. However, many do not combine these qualities.

The second idol to fall was my sense of entitlement to be treated in a certain way. Whatever slights I had suffered up to this point paled in comparison to this new kind of vulnerability. Having been raised to be as independent as possible, I found the task of petitioning others acutely painful to me. I had very few tools at my disposal for coping with the indignities of asking others for help, a situation many face far more frequently than I do, with far fewer resources. Visible to me now in the waiting rooms of medical offices and in hospital wards, these are the (mostly) women who fight on a daily basis on behalf of their children and other family members, demonstrating extraordinary levels of courage, intelligence, patience, and persistence, all of which frequently goes unrecognized. However, from my position of privilege, the events of my daughter's birth were shattering.

> A madman in Baghdad throws a stone into a shop selling glasses and all the glasses shatter with a great crash. When people ask him why he caused such damage, he answers: "I so enjoyed the crash and the tinkling sound! Whether it causes damage or is of any use to others, that has nothing to do with me as a madman."
>
> (Farid al-Din 'Attar d. 1220 CE)[6]

CALLING FOR HELP

> Oh humanity! An example has been made, so listen to it carefully. Those whom you call upon beside God are not even able to create a single fly, even if they were to join together to do it. And if a fly steals something from them, they cannot get it back. How feeble are both the seeker and the sought!
>
> (Qur'an 22:73)

There are many false gods to call upon, some more obviously fake than others and more easily exposed. Belief in the omniscience and omnipotence of modern medicine is sustainable only by those who have had very limited interactions with the medical profession and its institutions. Many of the doctors I have worked with have expressed their awareness of the limits of their prescriptions, tests, and interventions, and my confidence in them is in direct proportion to their humility. However, what has been even harder to

bear than the limits of knowledge in the medical profession and its institutions are the limits in its ability to provide comfort; one could say that I have searched for a personal and caring god here without success. One arrives in an emergency room with the expectation that all will be taken care of. Instead, obtaining necessary care in today's medical system is more often than not a sustained struggle that requires tactical skills. Although a bewildering array of people provide services in emergency rooms and hospitals, they are empowered to act only in carefully demarcated areas. In New York State, hospitals are required to post and give patients a copy of the ''Patients' Bill of Rights.'' Among the rights given to patients is the right to ''know the names, positions, and functions of any hospital staff involved in your care and refuse their treatment, examination or observation.''[7] Everyone who cares for patients in hospitals must understand this right along with the other rights of patients. Once, I sat in an emergency room perched on the edge of a gurney for three hours before finally being told by a kind worker that there was no one available that evening who had the authority to examine a child beyond the initial triage.

To return to the ''Patients' Bill of Rights,'' the language used here is significant: it is the language of legal ethics, not the ethics of medical care. What is odd about this is that one is certainly not looking to pick a fight in a hospital or an emergency room, yet a strategic, rational analysis of the system followed by assertive and sometimes aggressive action is frequently necessary to get needed care. It is extremely important for a patient to understand who has the power to do what in the hierarchical structure of hospitals. It is also important to understand that the primary task of the hospital is to care for the body, not the person or the soul that inhabits the person. The responsibility for attempting to relieve the fear, grief, boredom, and exhaustion that patients and caretakers experience comes under the rubric of auxiliary services: the social workers, chaplains, and recreational therapists who are entrusted with the power to soothe and help patients within limited parameters. So, although the hospital is invaluable in its rationing out of resources for keeping the body functioning as well as possible, it makes for a very poor god.

Second only to the fear for the well-being of one's child is the fear of how one will be able to pay for extraordinary medical costs. It has been suggested by some scholars that the concept of God's providence has been replaced in modern societies by a belief in the providence of the state and the economic structures that are tied to it.[8] The safety net for expensive medical costs in the United States is insurance, provided by and partially paid for by employers, privately purchased, or, as a last resort, provided by the state. Although the reimbursement guidelines for these organizations are relatively clear, anyone with extensive medical bills knows that getting all of the bills paid appropriately requires an endurance marathon of phone calls and e-mails if one does not want to end up with thousands or even tens of thousands of

dollars in bills. If the primary organizing principle of hospitals is hierarchical, the organizing principle of health maintenance and other kinds of insurance organizations is bureaucratic, a structure that seems to lend itself to labyrinths of inflexible, complex, and sometimes absurd procedures for obtaining the resources that are the right of the members.

A key characteristic of these organizations is that there is no way to develop a personal relationship with any individual. In hierarchical organizations like hospitals, it is relatively easy, once one understands and respects what each person can and cannot do, to make personal connections. However, in most health maintenance organizations and insurance companies, a series of barriers separate the member and those who have the power to reimburse claims. Most use automatic phone systems that are presumably designed to increase efficiency but that unnecessarily delay members whose problems can only be addressed by speaking with a live customer service representative. When a live representative is finally reached, he or she is instructed to identify himself or herself by their first names only, and it is more than likely that one will never speak to the same representative twice. When an initial, single error compounds itself into a series of errors that require multiple phone calls, each phone call will be answered by a new representative who will piece together what happened by means of their computer records, feeling no personal responsibility for the preceding errors and therefore no corresponding sense of urgency concerning the problem. While this system perhaps succeeds in its function of equitably distributing limited resources to members with the requisite stamina, this success comes at the cost of an outrage. The more you and your dependents have suffered through medical procedures, hospital stays, and doctors' visits, and the more your time and resources have been stretched to the breaking point, the more you will be subjected to frustrating struggles with anonymous company representatives and systems. The point here is not to complain, as I am acutely aware of how fortunate I am to have good insurance and access to good medical care, but to point out the deficiencies of the providential god of the insurance society.

BARGAINING WITH GOD

> Call upon [God] in fear and longing.
>
> (Qur'an 7:56)

Of course, hospitals and insurance companies make for rather silly idols. Another trick of the religious imagination is more personal: the attempt to bargain with God. Uncharacteristically for me, I adopted this approach wholeheartedly in the period in which my daughter was having repeated *grand mal* seizures. No medicine seemed to work and the violent seizures

increased, making it difficult to leave her alone for even a moment. It was difficult to do anything but sit and wait for the next seizure, whether that would be in a few minutes or a few weeks. Little by little, I found myself unraveling. God did not appear to help me like the Superman I watched on TV and in movies as a child or in the news coverage of real-life Superman stories. When a child who has fallen down a well is saved, I am the first to start weeping. However, I am also the first to raise the moral question of the other children who are not saved but die horribly instead. Are there not enough Supermen to go around? But, regardless of my misgivings as to the integrity of the process, I began, in my distress, to do what I had assiduously avoided up to this point in my life: I began to pray to God, the merchant. What would it take to buy the end of my daughter's seizures? I was willing to put everything I had on the table.

There is a degree of legitimacy to this approach; sometimes God sounds like a merchant in the Qur'an. The ultimate bargain, after all, is the afterlife. You work hard and try to behave yourself for a few decades and obtain happiness for eternity, which is a pretty good deal. But there is a problem. Justice of this sort, and the arguments of theodicy that assure you that everything will be fine in the end, work best when you are sitting on the fence at a distance, not sitting waiting for the next seizure.[9] The problem is in the moment, not later. Within the moment, there is no good reason for suffering, especially the suffering of those without blame. A passage from Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* is often quoted in discussions of theodicy.[10] This passage questions the notion that harmony in the afterlife can justify horrific suffering, especially the suffering inflicted on others by human beings. When the character Ivan Karamazov visits his brother Alyosha, who is training to be a priest in a monastery, Ivan uses a number of horrible examples of tortured children and animals to argue that innocent suffering could never be part of a larger scheme of justice, or at least not one that he would want to be a part of.

> I don't want harmony, for love of mankind I don't want it. I want to remain with unrequited suffering. I'd rather remain with my unrequited suffering and my unquenched indignation, *even if I am wrong*. Besides, they have put too high a price on harmony; we can't afford to pay so much for admission. And therefore, I hasten to return my ticket. And it is my duty, if only as an honest man, to return it as far ahead of time as possible. Which is what I'm doing. It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha. I just most respectfully return him the ticket.[11]

I have always sided with Ivan. In the moment or string of moments of horror and terror, do we have to tolerate the intolerable? Is *this* what has to be put on the bargaining table? A point comes where the language of prayer moves from the mercantile to the *crie du coeur* (cry of the heart), from the rational bargaining of resources, goods, rights, and entitlements to cries into the unseen. What kind of prayer is appropriate when you are alone with your

child in a hospital room in the middle of the night and an excruciatingly painful and invasive medical procedure must be done, especially when you are not totally convinced that it is necessary? I do not have an answer to this other than to relate something I heard from a 13-year-old girl. Some years ago, I was with a group of young Muslim girls who were talking about whether it is acceptable to pray to get good grades at school. Several of them were shocked at the very idea of asking God for something so petty, thinking prayer should be saved for more serious matters and for the benefit of others. This girl, however, vehemently denied this line of thinking; she kept repeating, "There are no boundaries! There are no boundaries!" The desire to obtain good grades or a soul mate, and the pleading to stop the suffering of oneself or another is, in the end, all the same. Prayer, at the point where the bargaining stops and honesty begins, is a dive off a cliff into the unknown.

> In the beginning, when I was a novice in love,
> My neighbor could not sleep at night from my whimpers.
> But now, as my pain has increased, my whimpering has decreased.
> When fire takes over something completely, smoke dwindles.
>
> (Ahmad Ghazzali d.1126 CE)[12]

THE TRIAL

> The human being was created weak.
>
> (Qur'an 4:28)

> The human being was made of haste.
>
> (Qur'an 21:37)

> The human being was created with anxiety.
>
> (Qur'an 70:19)

> Say: Even if you were to possess the hidden treasures of the mercy of my Lord, you would cling to them, afraid of expending them. The human being is ever niggardly.
>
> (Qur'an 17:100)

> The love of worldly desires has been made attractive to human beings: the desire for women, sons, piles of gold and silver, fine horses, livestock, and fertile land.
>
> (Qur'an 3:14)

> Souls are prone to selfish greed.
>
> (Qur'an 4:128)

> You love possessions with an ardent love.
>
> (Qur'an 89:20)

> The human being wearies not of praying for good; but if something bad touches him, he is despairing and hopeless.
>
> (Qur'an 41:49)

Alongside the terrifying moments of acute medical crises, there is the grind of chronic conditions, and it is in this daily grind that one has the time to experience the breadth and depth of one's faults and weaknesses. The quotes from the Qur'an above suggest that the very substance of the human being is comprised of weakness, impatience, agitation, selfishness, self-pity, greed, and the narcissistic need for material things and other people. The angels themselves were aghast when power was entrusted to this strange and frightening creature with its all-consuming desires and lack of self-control:

> When your Lord said to the angels, "I am putting a deputy on the earth," they said, "Why put on it one who will cause corruption on it and shed blood while we glorify You with praise and proclaim your holiness?"
>
> He said, "I know what you do not know."
>
> (Qur'an 2:30)

Although the angels could not understand what God understood, they were prescient in their assessment. They knew that the weaknesses with which Adam and Eve were created would lead to the actions that caused their fall from the Garden and their subsequent actions on earth. The seal on the fate of human beings was "Go down, each of you an enemy to the other" (Qur'an 2:36, 7:24). This is a curse suggesting that, down here on earth, enmity flows more naturally between human beings than does altruism, mutual aid, or care for one another. The ferocity with which humans deal with one another is met in equal part with the burdens experienced by the vulnerability of the body on earth, with its burdens of illness, hunger, thirst, and need for shelter. To be human is to experience corporeal and emotional vulnerabilities: bodily pain and discomfort, fatigue, anguish, grief, and fear. As the Qur'an says, "We created mankind in trouble" (Qur'an 90:4).[13]

Among those who do not consider themselves practitioners of a religion, there is a common perception of religion as a kind of security blanket for believers, offering some degree of defense for its holder against fear and

despair. Although this may be true for some believers, there are also many examples of religious figures who express the pain of life without trying to minimize it, even as they turn toward God. The classic literary expression for this spiritual attitude is the lament or complaint. In the Qur'an, Mary is described as having to face the pain of giving birth to Jesus alone, her sense of isolation intensified by a community that is quick to condemn her. As she is overwhelmed by the agonies of childbirth, she cries out, "Would that I had died before this and been a thing forgotten!" (Qur'an 19:23). The Prophet Jacob has to bear not only the lies and deception of his sons but also his grief for the son that has been taken away from him:

> And he turned away from them, saying, "Oh my sorrow for Joseph!" His eyes were full with of grief but he suppressed his anger. They said, "By God, will you never stop remembering Joseph until you are overcome by disease and then death?" He said, "I complain of my sorrow and grief to God alone, and I know from God what you do not know."
>
> (Qur'an 12:84–86)

The Sufi master 'Abdullah Ansari (d.1039 CE) cries out in his rhymed *Munajat* (whispered conversations with God):

> Oh God, this is not living but torture.
> This is not life, but a structure reared on water.
> Without Your grace, we are undone.[14]

Another Sufi, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad al-Junayd (d. 910 CE), has a much dryer style. This is especially useful for dispelling the mental trick that seeks escape from the realities of pain and suffering by imagining that the particular events of one's own life are unusual, thereby granting one the illusion that one is somehow special in one's pain. Instead, life's indignities and cruelties are only too normal for countless numbers of people. Junayd said, "I don't perceive what I endure from the world as something loathsome. For I accept it as a basic fact that the here and now is a house of grief and sorrow, of torment and affliction, and that the world is utterly bad. Thus, it is normal if it confronts me with everything I find repulsive. If it confronts me with what I like, that is something above the normal. But the original, normal situation is the first case."[15]

The famous Sufi and poet Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 1273 CE) was amazed that we remain attached to a world that causes so much pain:

> Look not at time's events, which come from the spheres and make life so disagreeable.
> Look not at this dearth of daily bread and means of livelihood! Look not at this fear and trembling.

> Look instead at this: In spite of all the world's bitterness, you are passionately and shamelessly attached to it.[16]

The trial or affliction of being human, then, is the experiencing of our vulnerability both from without and from within, from those who would hurt us, from the afflictions of the body and poverty, and from the endless refilling of our desires and fears.

According to the Qur'an, humanity brings additional pain and suffering upon itself in three primary ways.[17] I have already mentioned the absurd intensity and diligence with which one can look for help in all the wrong places. This is the cognitive error that the Qur'an refers to as idolatry (*shirk*).[18] Another cause of pain for human beings is the disconnection between stated belief and actions, a phenomenon that the Qur'an refers to as hypocrisy (*nifaq*). The problem most often referred to, however, is called *kufr,* a word that is usually translated as "unbelief" or "infidelity." "Unbelief" is a problematic translation because the English word "belief" suggests a cognitive function that is implied only secondarily in the Arabic. "Infidelity" is better, but it still fails to capture the full sense of the Arabic word, which connotes the refusal to acknowledge the favor or benefit that has been conferred upon one; its antonym is thankfulness (*shukr*).[19] The Qur'an says, "Verily, We have displayed for humanity all of our signs in this Qur'an, but most people refuse to acknowledge them, except by rejecting them (*illa kufuran*)" (Qur'an 17:89, 25:50). The primary meaning of *kufr,* then, is relational. In English one can say, "I believe in you," which implies wholehearted support for another person. The word *kufr* refers to the rejection of this kind of belief. To be an "unbeliever" (*kafir*) is to think badly of God.

The Qur'an uses two words to describe alternative attitudes that will ultimately lessen pain and lead to happiness. The first attitude is "submission" (*islam*), which strikes at the very heart of human restlessness and agitation. The Persian poet Rabi'a bint Ka'b (fl. tenth century CE) writes, "I acted like a wild horse not knowing: to struggle only draws the noose tighter."[20] To be "one who submits" (*muslim*) thus means to stop running and hand oneself over to God. To struggle in the midst of physical pain or emotional suffering only increases one's pain. The only way out is to do what is counterintuitive: to relax and submit to the pain. To be "one who submits" is thus to recognize one's smallness and the fact that self-aggrandizement adds to the pain. According to the Persian Sufi Hakim Sana'i (d. 1131 CE),

> Humility[21] suits you but violence does not.
> A naked man frantic in a beehive is out of place.[22]

The second attitude is faith (*iman*), which entails thinking well of God (*husn al-zann*).[23] As with the term "infidelity" (*kufr*), the meaning of *iman* is less cognitive than relational. In the following verses, Sana'i compares our careless cruelty (*jafa'*) to God's loyalty and fidelity (*wafa'*):

You have been unkind
Yet He keeps his faith in you.
He is more loyal to you
Than you are to yourself.[24]

To think badly of God is to lose faith in one's potential as a human being, to lose faith in discovering what was meant when God said to the angels, ''I know what you do not know'' (Qur'an 2:30). Human beings are a mysterious mixture of the high and the low: ''We created humanity in the best kind of symmetry and then We turned him into the lowest of the low'' (Qur'an 95:4–5). ''By the soul and that which shaped it and inspired it in its shamelessness and its consciousness of God (*taqwa*)'' (Qur'an 91:7–8).

Sufi writers have not been above pointing out the apparent contradictions in God's plan, even as they admit that it is impolite to do so. In another one of his *Munajat,* Ansari writes:

Oh God, You poured the jewels of purity into Adam's lap
And sifted the powder of rebellion upon Satan's head.
You mingled these two opposites.

In courtesy to You I should say that we did wrong,
But in reality, You provoked the mischief![25]

To return to the matter of justice, the problem is clear. The deck is stacked against human beings in a grand way, and yet the beauty of being human lies precisely in the tension between man's extraordinary capacity to behave badly and the equally extraordinary possibility of acting well. To accept this situation wholeheartedly requires giving up the ''logic'' of human notions of justice and embracing the ''illogic'' of pure giving.

CHOOSING A NEW ECONOMY

Be contented with your lot;
But if you have any complaints,
Go and take them to the judge,
And obtain satisfaction from him.
That's how the fool's mind works![26]

(Sana'i)

I have mentioned how hospital and insurance systems run on the principle that there is a finite amount of resources; their job is to distribute these resources as equitably as possible to patients and members. However, given the fact that the resources are limited and organizations are not always efficient in what they do, the smart caregiver quickly realizes that one of her

many jobs is to fight with persistence and resolve to make sure that the patient and the patient's family get the help they need. The principle of equitable distribution and the fight for justice is similar to the mercantile bargain with one's soul, albeit with the addition of a stronger guarantee of justice: if you are good and do what you should, you will be rewarded—if not here, then in the afterlife. The Qur'an states repeatedly that there will be no injustice in the end: "You will not be treated unjustly by even so much as the thin membrane in the groove of a date-stone" (Qur'an 4:77; see also 4:49 and 17:71). Although seeking and attaining justice is a praiseworthy goal that is both necessary and liberating, it is ultimately unsatisfying if it is not itself liberated by the qualities of forgiveness and generosity. Likewise, the pragmatic goal of securing essential needs for oneself and one's family becomes oppressive if it is not balanced with the acceptance of uncertainty. Otherwise, fear may manifest itself as a form of niggardliness:

> The mean live in fear
> for their daily bread.
>
> The generous never eat
> yesterday's reheated leftovers.[27]
>
> (Sana'i)

Sana'i's playful metaphor in these verses unexpectedly locates pleasure in giving without fear, a voluntary embrace of insecurity. The word "generosity" refers to something beyond responding to the needs of others. It refers not only to the act of giving but also to an attitude behind the act that renounces any claims to recompense or guarantees that one's needs will be met equally in the future.

The act of giving to another may start from a principle of equity—if one has more than someone else, it is only right to give up some of what one has—but giving past the boundaries of this logic is something else altogether. Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1074 CE) describes three different degrees of generosity, using a different word in Arabic for each: "According to the Sufis, *sakha'* is the first degree of generosity. *Jud* comes after it, and then *ithar*, preferring others to oneself. Whoever gives a part and keeps a part [of his wealth] possesses *sakha'*. Whoever freely distributes most of it but keeps something for himself possesses *jud*. The man who suffers need but prefers that someone else have enough possesses *ithar*."[28]

The first degree of generosity described by Qushayri is necessary for social cohesion. It is hard to imagine a society that could exist without some degree of redistribution of wealth and resources from those who have a great deal to those who have very little. It is also hard to see this as much more than enlightened self-interest; societies with gross inequalities are not secure societies. Individuals who are not giving in their relationships tend to have unstable

relationships. To not respond at this level is to demonstrate ignorance of this fact, as well as a complete contempt for others, whether crudely justified or not. ''And when it is said to them, 'Spend out of that which God has given you,' those who are ungrateful say to those who have faith, 'Should we feed someone who, if God had willed, He could have fed?''' (Qur'an 36:47).

However, giving out of enlightened self-interest is still the same as bartering. The Qur'an accepts this as such and offers reassurance: ''Whatever you spend in the way of God will be paid back to you in full and you will not be wronged'' (Qur'an 8:60). Although the Qur'an accepts the concept of bartering, the phrase ''Spend out of that which God has given you'' in Qur'anic verse 36:47 suggests that the premise of personal ownership, whether of resources, honor, or security, is a faulty one. It is very easy to take health and privileged social and economic circumstances for granted. However, if what you possess is as much the result of good fortune as it is of individual exertion, then the concepts of personal property and personal rights have to be understood in a larger context. Enlightened self-interest would recognize that self-sufficiency is not permanent; familial or communal aid is needed by everyone at some point in one's life. The essential logic is still one of bartering, but within a wider context of time and justice that recognizes that ''what goes around comes around.''

Beyond the level of generosity understood as enlightened self-interest, there is a kind of generosity beyond the principle of the ''fair deal'' and the basic logic of functional families and societies. Rather than a one-to-one exchange, the premise here is that there is more than enough to go around and that the very act of giving leads to the multiplication of resources and energy. Qushayri uses the word *jawad* to describe someone who keeps a little for himself but gives away most of what he has; such a person practices the type of generosity known as *jud*. This word comes from the same Arabic root as *jawd,* which is used to describe a plentiful rain. The Qur'an uses an agricultural metaphor to describe this kind of generosity that moves beyond the level of bartering: ''The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is like a grain out of which grows seven ears and in every ear there are a hundred grains. God multiplies for whom He wills. God is vast [in providing], knowing'' (Qur'an 2:261). ''The likeness of those who spend their wealth seeking God's pleasure and for the strengthening of their souls is like a garden on high ground. Heavy rain falls and its produce is doubled and, when the heavy rain does not fall, there is still dew'' (Qur'an 2:265).

All kinds of generosity require the letting go of fear. To accept the barter arrangement, a degree of faith in other people is necessary, as well as faith in the ultimate, if not always immediate, likelihood of fairness. Accepting the principle of abundant generosity is different in that it involves letting go of the need to stockpile one's resources, whether those resources are emotional or material. While the logic of bartering is necessary for smooth familial and communal functioning, the logic of giving up one's stockpiles is more difficult

to accept. Certainly, it is not a ‘‘natural’’ impulse in human beings. As the Qur’an says, ‘‘Humankind is ever niggardly’’ (Qur’an 17:100). However, generosity is a trait that can be conditioned culturally or individually. The Arabic word *birr* (righteousness founded on generosity) comes from the same root as the word *barr,* a wide open space. This word is used in the Qur’an to describe the human quality of kindness and generosity that requires discipline: ‘‘You will never attain *birr* until you spend of what you love’’ (Qur’an 3:92). Giving up one’s stockpiles is difficult but ultimately more rewarding than clinging to one’s emotional resources and material possessions.

Qushayri’s text mentions a third level of generosity, *ithar,* which means preferring another to oneself. He relates the story of a Sufi who was aware of a hidden niggardliness within himself, even though he was considered generous by others.

> ‘Abdallah ibn Ja‘far was told, ‘‘You lavish much when you are asked, but you won’t ask the slightest thing from those to whom you have given!’’ ‘‘I give my money freely,’’ he said, ‘‘but I’m stingy with my mind.’’ ‘Abdallah ibn Ja‘far went out to his country estate. He stopped by somebody’s palm garden where a young black slave was working. When the boy got his food, a dog came into the enclosure and approached him. The boy threw him a piece of bread and he ate it. Then he threw him a second, and a third, and the dog ate those too. ‘Abdallah ibn Ja‘far watched this. ‘‘Young man, how much of your food meets this fate every day?’’ he asked. ‘‘As you see.’’ ‘‘Why do you prefer this dog to yourself?’’ ‘‘This is not dog country,’’ the boy said. ‘‘He must have come a very long distance out of hunger, and I hate to turn him away.’’ ‘‘And how do you fare the day?’’ ‘‘Today I will go hungry.’’ ‘‘And am I scolded for too much generosity?’’ ‘Abdallah ibn Ja‘far exclaimed. ‘‘This fellow is much more generous than I am!’’ So he bought the youth, the garden, and the tools that were in it, then freed the boy and gave it all to him.[29]

While there is a clear logic to bartering and sharing one’s resources with others, preferring others to oneself makes little sense. Qushayri related, ‘‘I heard Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say. . .that al-Daqqaq said, ‘It is not generosity when the one who has gives to the one who has nothing, but it is generosity when the one who has nothing gives to the one who has.’ ’’[30]

Although people can be trained to act as if they prefer others to themselves, as in the cultural conditioning of gender and classes, the conditioning runs only so deep. The kind of generosity described here, actually preferring others to oneself, is not disciplined self-denial but effortless, weightless selflessness. Note the wording in the following quotation from the Qur’an, which describes those who helped the refugees fleeing Mecca for Medina in the early years of the Muslim community: ‘‘Those who made their abode in the city and in faith before [the refugees] love those who emigrated to them. They find no need in their hearts for what has been given them and prefer

[the refugees] to themselves even if they are themselves in dire poverty'' (Qur'an 59:9).

Those who are in dire poverty ''find no need in their hearts for what has been given them!'' Given the niggardliness of the human soul, it is difficult to imagine how one would not feel one's own need. However, the feeling of preferring others to oneself is a feeling that most people have experienced: it is the feeling of being in love and of preferring the beloved to oneself. In the state of love, one feels an effortless and pleasurable selflessness that is not the same as renunciation or the negation of desire. The vortex of self-interest has been calmed, and instead of feeling grim self-denial, one instead feels playful. The supposedly ''insane'' person who has been freed from the niggardliness of his soul feels more pleasure, not less, even as he accepts the reality of suffering, his own included. 'Attar writes: ''A madman rides about on a hobby-horse with a smile on his face and cheerfully singing like a nightingale. Someone asks him: 'Why are you riding around so quickly?' He answers: 'I have a craving to ride all over the world before they chain my hands and feet, and not a hair on my body can raise itself any longer.' ''[31]

Qushayri presents the different kinds of generosity as a progression, with each degree indicating a greater ability to put others before oneself. But in the daily struggle with our interactions with others, the reality seems to be that there are moments where one is capable of giving freely out of what one has and other moments where one can barely manage to act with basic decency. The moments when one prefers another to oneself are rare but defining. Caretakers are often given the advice to take care of themselves first, which is good advice. However, the difficulties of caring for the chronically ill are not fully addressed by this advice; something more is needed that acknowledges the burdens of seemingly unending demands and struggles and one's feelings of inadequacy in trying to respond to them with at least a modicum of grace. The Sufi writings quoted above offer an elegant aesthetic for behavior, which accepts human weaknesses while pointing toward unexpected possibilities.

To return to the issue of the systems and organizations that exist for providing care and distributing resources, it is hard to imagine a social structure that could function like 'Attar's madman. The levels of generosity that Qushayri mentions, however, suggest that the virtue of generosity can be realized in different ways at different times. It is possible to develop organizational structures that encourage and foster responsiveness toward others; caring for the well-being of others cannot be forced, but it can be nurtured at all levels of a hierarchy and in all the nooks and crannies of bureaucracies. While organizational change works best when it is initiated and supported by those with the most power within the organization, it is also possible for any individual at any point in the system, including the petitioner in need, to choose to act with generosity. Every person who has power over another (and, if we take these stories to heart, there is no such thing as a person

without power) has the choice to exercise that power for self-interest, for justice, or in gratuitous acts of generosity.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

We began with an imaginary dialogue between God and humanity at the end of time, in which God asks the children of Adam why they did not care for Him when He was ill, hungry, and thirsty. Although from a strict Islamic theological viewpoint, such questions are improper—because God in Islam can never be ill, hungry, or thirsty and is far beyond the need for care—this story makes an important point. It addresses the common human problem of looking for God in the wrong places by suggesting moral localities in which the presence of God can be found. God locates His presence precisely at the point where the corporeal and emotional vulnerability of the human condition meets the anxious, greedy, and selfish human characteristics that so horrified the angels at the time of humanity's creation. To turn away from the discomfort of the moments when one is asked to respond to the suffering of others is, in a sense, to turn away from the presence of God, thereby dimming one's potential as a human being. As Sana'i says,

> The person who does not turn his face towards the Real—
> Considers everything he has and knows as an idol.
>
> As for one who turns away from the presence of the Real,
> In reality,[32] I cannot say that this person is a human being.[33]

In the face of suffering and in being asked to respond to the needs of others, the person of weak faith might ask, "Where is God?" However, for a Muslim, that is the wrong question to ask. When all is said and done, as Sana'i says:

> You are you.
> From this comes kindness and enmity.
>
> You are you.
> From this comes both faith and ingratitude.[34]

NOTES

1. Quoted in William A. Graham's *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or* Hadith Qudsi (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 179–80. Graham notes the resemblance of this divine saying to Matthew 25:41–45 in the Bible. The translation here is Graham's, with slight modifications.

2. A *hadith* (pl. *ahadith*) is a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. A *hadith qudsi* is a saying attributed to Muhammad in which God Himself is said to have spoken.

3. Two excellent introductions to the history and thought of Sufism are Carl W. Ernst's *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala, 1997) and Annemarie Schimmel's *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

4. This chapter relies heavily on conversations and experiences I have shared with others, of whom I would particularly like to acknowledge Tahira Sands, Leila Ispahany, Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, and Samuel Conway.

5. The translations of the Qur'an here are drawn from those of A.J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1975); Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984); and Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley's *The Noble Qur'an: A New Rendering of its Meaning in English* (Norwich: Bookwork, 1999).

6. Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Musibatnama*, 8/4. Quoted in Helmut Ritter's *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din 'Attar,* Translated from German by John O'Kane with Editorial Assistance of Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 255. I have made one slight change in O'Kane's translation, substituting "madman" for the word "fool." The Persian word is *divaneh.*

7. Patients' Bill of Rights, New York State Hospital Code Section 405.7. This Bill of Rights is posted throughout hospitals in New York State.

8. Joseph A. Amato, *Victims and Values: A History and a Theory of Suffering* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), 89.

9. The term "theodicy" was coined by the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (d. 1716) to refer to "the attempt to demonstrate that divine justice remains uncompromised by the manifold evils of existence," Eric L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over Al-Ghazali's "Best of All Possible Worlds"* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3.

10. See, for example, Brian Hebblethwaite's *Evil, Suffering and Religion* (London, U.K.: SPCK, 2000), 5–6.

11. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* translated and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 287 (Part II, Book V, Chapter 4).

12. Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits,* trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (London, U.K.: KPI Limited, 1986), 44.

13. The word translated here as "trouble" is *kabad*. Muhammad Asad notes that it comprises the concepts of "pain," "distress," "hardship," "toil," and "trial" (*The Message of the Qur'an,* 952 n.3). The word for liver, *kabid,* which comes from the same Arabic root, was considered the source of the passions and even enmity in pre-modern Arab culture. See E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 2:2584.

14. *Munajat: The Intimate Prayers of Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari,* trans. Lawrence Morris and Rustam Sarfeh (New York: Khaneghah and Maktab of Maleknia Naseralishah, 1975), 39. The *Munajat* has also been translated into English in *Ibn 'Ata' illah: The Book of Wisdom and Khwaja Abdullah Ansari: Intimate*

Conversations, trans. Victor Danner and Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

15. Quoted in Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, from *Hilyat al-awliya' wa-tabaqat al-asfiya'* of Abu Nu'aym Ahmad b. 'Abd Allah al-Isbahani (d. 1038 CE), 10/270; and *Sharh al-Hikam* of Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. 'Abbad al-Nafzi al-Rundi (d. 1390 CE), commentary on the text *al-Hikam* of Abu'l-Fadl Ahmad b. Muhammad Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari (d. 1309 CE), 1/32.

16. Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, *Mathnawi*, 6:1733–1735, trans. William C. Chittick in *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 57.

17. When the Qur'an criticizes entire communities, it is such beliefs, attitudes, and actions that are being criticized. The terms "one who submits" (*muslim*) and "one who is faithful" (*mu'min*) are used to describe the adherents of several faiths. Similarly, Sufi writings are replete with references to the idolatry, hypocrisy, and infidelity that Sufis locate within themselves.

18. *Shirk* means to associate anything or anyone with the Absolute, which is God.

19. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:2620.

20. Peter Lamborn Wilson and Nasrollah Pourjavady, trans., *The Drunken Universe: An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987), 65.

21. The Persian word translated as "humility," *zari*, also means "lamentation," or "cry for help."

22. Hakim Sana'i, *The Walled Garden of Truth*, trans. David Pendlebury (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1976), 18. Pendlebury's work is an abridgement and revised translation of Major J. Stephenson's translation and edited Persian text of *The First Book of the Hadiqatu'l-Haqiqat* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1970). This selection from Sana'i appears on pages 42 (English translation) and 27 (Persian text) of Stephenson's work.

23. The concept of "thinking well" (*husn al-zann*) of people and of God is a common expression in Sufi writings. See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 118, 128.

24. Sana'i, *The Walled Garden of Truth*, trans. Pendlebury, 23; Stephenson, *Hadiqatu'l-Haqiqat*, English 59, Persian text 37. I have modified Pendlebury's translation here.

25. Ansari,*Munajat*, trans. Morris and Sarfeh, 45. I have made slight modifications in the translation. For the impoliteness of pointing out God's part in the moral failings of human beings, see also *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson (London, U.K.: Luzac, 1972), 1:1488–1494.

26. Sana'i, *The Walled Garden of Truth*, trans. Pendlebury, 17. See also Sana'i, *Hadiqatu'l-Haqiqat*, trans. Stephenson, 37 (English translation) and 24 (Persian text).

27. Sana'i, *The Walled Garden of Truth*, trans. Pendlebury, 26. See also Sana'i, *Hadiqatu'l-Haqiqat*, trans. Stephenson, 63 (English translation) and 40 (Persian text).

28. Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Sufi Book of Spiritual Ascent (Al-Risala al-Qushayriya*), trans. Rabia Teri Harris, ed., Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago, Illinois: ABC

International Group, 1997), 231–232. There is another partial English translation of this work by Barbara R. von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*(Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1992).

29. Al-Qushayri, *Sufi Book of Spiritual Ascent,* 235.

30. Ibid., 240.

31. Farid al-Din ʻAttar, *Ilahinama,* 14/20. Quoted in Ritter's *The Ocean of the Soul,* 254–255.

32. There is a play on words here, in repeating the word Sufis frequently use to refer to God, ''the Real'' (*al-Haqq*) with the emphasis of the phrase ''in reality'' (*bi-l-haqq*).

33. Sana'i, *Hadiqatu'l-Haqiqat,* trans. Stephenson, 29 (English translation) and 18 (Persian text). I have modified Stephenson's translation here.

34. Sana'i, *The Walled Garden of Truth,* trans. Pendlebury, 19; and *Hadiqatu'l-Haqiqat,* trans. Stephenson, 43 (English translation) and 28 (Persian text). The translation here is my own.

10

THE MIRACLE OF PAIN

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

With blisters the size of Brazil
and headaches the size of Manhattan—
why is spiritual pursuit so associated with
physical pain?

Abd al-Qadir Jilani used to
tie his hair to a nail on the wall to
snap his head back if he dozed off
reading Qur'an.
Christian mystics endure endless permutations of
difficulty, including spontaneously
bleeding from the
wounds of Christ.
Sitting in Buddhist meditation on puffy black cushions
crosslegged for hours to
focus the mind nearly
drove me up the wall I was facing.

Birth is no picnic. Death often
less so. Life in between: a
tough love event.

Yet it all brings us to God.

These blisters on feet around
Ka'ba marble
around and around,
the headache that comes from
odd short hours of

sleep in order to
wake up the heart before Allah in the
last watches of the night—
the abode of lovers—

is the price to pay for *ma'rifa*[1]—
as all creatures of this earth must
crack open the shells on acorns or mussels to get
the meat, the
earth splits apart revealing
deep fissures of ruby, whole
generations drown and later generations
come—a

tear of joy forms in the eye of one
who sees *The One Who*
Sees!

NOTES

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *Mecca/Medina Time-Warp*. Reprinted here from a Zilzal Press chapbook, by permission from the author.

1. *Ma'rifa* means "recognition of the Divine Reality."

11

Death and Burial in Islam

Rkia Elaroui Cornell

As a young married woman and the mother of a two-year-old daughter, I worked at one of the largest Islamic centers in the United States, the Islamic Center of Southern California in the city of Los Angeles. It was 1980, a time when the Muslim community of Los Angeles was going through significant changes because of their large population growth. This demographic boom warranted an increased need for various religious services to be rendered. This in turn created job opportunities for immigrant Muslims with expertise in Arabic language teaching and Qur'anic studies.

I had just moved to the United States with my husband, who was then a graduate student in Islamic Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. At the Islamic Center I established an Islamic Sunday School program, taught Arabic and the Qur'an, acted as a religious and spiritual advisor for female community members, provided information on Islam for non-Muslims, and assisted new converts and those on the verge of converting to Islam to know more about the religion they were about to embrace. When I was not teaching, advising, developing educational programs, or coordinating some of the Center's social activities, I acted as an administrative assistant to the Center's director and its nine trustees. Preparing bodies for burial was not part of my job description. However, when circumstances forced me to take on this responsibility, it turned out to be one of the most challenging and important services that I rendered for the Center and the community.

Although 26 years have passed, I still remember the dreadful phone call that I received in my office at around ten o'clock on a Monday morning. The voice was that of a young Muslim man from Canada, informing me of the sudden death of his bride in a West Hollywood hotel room. They had been in Los Angeles to celebrate their honeymoon, and the woman's death had snatched the young man's wife away from him in the blink of an eye. The police ran their investigation, the autopsy results revealed no foul play, and since embalming is not allowed in Islam, the body had to be cleaned, shrouded, and buried as soon as possible.

In this case, an autopsy had to be performed because of the woman's young age and because the cause of death was unknown. In California, the law dictates that such a procedure must take place even if it is objectionable to the religious beliefs of the deceased person's family. The death certificate is then signed by the Medical Examiner, and the Board of Health approves the body for burial.

Earlier, an elderly woman had passed away, but the cause of her death was unknown too. Her family refused to allow the coroner to perform an autopsy. They appealed to the Islamic Center for help. They asked the Center to explain to the authorities the religious reasons behind their stand. The Center's response to the coroner's office was that contemporary Islamic legal scholars were of two views on the matter of autopsies. Some do not object to an autopsy being performed, but others argue against it. Those who argue against autopsies feel that the relationship between the body and the soul continues after death. They believe that the dead person never loses her senses or feelings. According to this belief, the dead person is aware of what is going on around her and suffers because of this. The family's objection to subjecting the body of their deceased mother to the pain of an autopsy followed this opinion. They were also of the view that the body should not be used for organ donation or for any medical or scientific experimentation. This was because the body has to be intact on the Day of Judgment. In this particular case, the authorities honored the family's request. Because of the woman's advanced age, they did not insist on the rigid application of the law and waived the autopsy.

The poor young Canadian husband was not so lucky. He had no choice but to abide by the law because of his deceased wife's young age and because he did not want to be incriminated for her death. Having dealt with this harsh reality, he found solace in trying to fulfill the remaining religious obligations allowed to him before putting his wife's body to rest. He needed a Muslim woman to perform the cleansing of the body (*ghusl*) and a Muslim Imam to perform the funerary prayers (*salat al-janaza*). I informed the Center director of his call. He immediately called his wife and told her that a Muslim woman had died and that the young husband needed our help in preparing the body for burial.

The trip from the director's house to the funeral home was a long one. It took us nearly two hours to get there because of the lunch-hour traffic. During the trip, there was a minimal exchange of words among us. The sudden death of this young woman had immersed us in deep reflection on our own mortality. The fact that I was heading toward an experience that is usually considered taboo for young women in Muslim countries demanded an explanation.

In Islam, preparing bodies for burial is a religious duty that is not incumbent upon everyone but is only incumbent upon a sufficient number of people in the community (*fard kifaya*). Those who perform this service

exempt the rest of the community from this responsibility. However, if no one performs the service, the blame would fall on the entire community. On this occasion, the director's wife and I were the only women available to perform this task. I could not allow myself to fail the community. However, I had doubts about my commitment because of the stigma that my Moroccan culture attached to young women who perform such a task. As a child, I was taught that if a young woman prepares a body for burial, the food she cooks will lose its taste and flavor. I shuddered at the idea but chose to disregard it as a cultural myth. After all, we were not in Morocco, where plenty of older widows are available to free young women from the burden of preparing bodies for burial. I saw the issue as one of the challenges that Muslim women living in non-Muslim countries have to face. In such circumstances, when a myth competes with a religious rule, the myth should lose and the needs of religion should prevail.

As I rode in the car to the mortuary, I could hear my mother reminding me not to fall into temptation, and not to forget the two angels watching over me at all times—one sitting on my right shoulder recording my good deeds, and the other on my left shoulder recording my bad deeds. These "Honored Scribes" (Qur'an 82:11) record every thought, every decision, and every act of a person in a big book or register and deliver their report on the Day of Judgment. In my religious Moroccan family, accountability to God is what life is all about. Thus, I was duty bound to render a service to the husband of the dead woman and nothing else mattered.

DEALING WITH DEATH

Important and serious thoughts about death came to my mind. Tragic deaths that happened during my childhood began to unfold in my memory. First, I remembered the politically motivated assassination of one of my parents' neighbors. This happened in the early 1950s. The assassination was carried out by some Berber traitors, who were known to work for the French at a time when Morocco was struggling to gain its independence. Although the assassination happened in the year that I was born, the house where it took place was attached to ours, and the fact that the murdered person was considered a martyr (*shahid,* literally, "witness") made the case very memorable.[1] I knew the family of the murdered person and the honor that the community bestowed on them. The second death that I remembered was that of my only brother, who died at the age of 18, along with two of his friends and schoolmates. After taking a swim in a nearby river, they caught a fever and died within 24 hours. Their death was a shock to everyone, and its memory filled me with sadness and grief. My parents could never recover from the loss of the only son they had, but they found consolation in the belief that my brother, along with all who died in their youth, would be

one of the Grooms of Paradise (*'ara'is al-janna*). The third death that I remembered was the accidental drowning of my one-year-old nephew, who had fallen into a well. He is still remembered by everybody in the family as one of the Birds of Paradise (*tuyur al-janna*). His parents, my eldest sister and her husband, were told that he would join the other children who had died very young and would bring water to relieve the thirst of the people who stood in line, waiting to be judged for their deeds, on Judgment Day.

I also remembered three other deaths, two of which involved murder and one that was a rare case of suicide. The case of suicide involved one of the students who went to my high school and was a year ahead of me. She was intelligent, beautiful, and very competitive. However, the pressures and anxieties associated with the nationwide exams that took place at the end of every academic year in Morocco led her to take her life. Her case was especially tragic because of the stigma Muslims attach to suicide, which is forbidden in Islam. The Qur'an forbids suicide unequivocally: "Do not kill yourselves, for Allah is merciful toward you. Whoever does this, whether out of enmity or oppression, We shall cast him into a Fire, which is an easy matter for God" (Qur'an 4:29–30). The Qur'an also warns believers, "Do not destroy yourselves by your own hand, but instead do acts of goodness, for Allah loves those who do good" (Qur'an 2:195). In Islam, taking life is the responsibility of God, the giver of life. The Qur'an is very clear that it is not the right of the human being to "play God" by arbitrarily deciding when one's own life or that of another should end. "Do not take life, which God has made sacred, except as a matter of justice" (Qur'an 6:151).

By killing herself, the girl confirmed that she despaired of God's mercy, which rendered her an outcast from the Islamic faith. Members of the community showed little sympathy toward her or for the reasons that led her to commit a crime against herself. They also did not offer much consolation to her family because her suicide was considered an offense against God. However, they did their duty and buried her, according to tradition. In most Muslim countries, the bodies of people who commit suicide are not buried facing the *Qibla*—the direction of Mecca—like other dead people. However, in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco where I was raised, it was believed that God should decide this issue. Before burying the student, the gravedigger went to the last grave in the cemetery, took the pickaxe he would use to dig her grave, and threw it behind himself as high as it would go. Wherever the pickaxe fell would be the place where he would dig the grave. The direction of the axe head would determine the direction the girl's head would face in the grave. If the fallen axe head faced the direction of the *Qibla,* this would mean that God might forgive her and that she might yet have access to salvation. However, as a suicide, she would still be denied the funerary prayers that are made at the time of burial.

The two cases of murder that I remembered were as follows. The first case happened on the wedding night of a young Arab couple. On that night, the

bride turned out not to be a virgin. The groom saw her lack of virginity as an affront to his honor and felt that it robbed him of something that was his right to possess on that special night. Enraged at what he felt to be an insult to his pride and dignity, he brutally murdered his young bride, mutilated her body, left a note describing the reason for the murder pinned to her chest, and disappeared before dawn. He has not been caught or seen to this day.

The second murder was that of a Berber woman in her late fifties. Twice divorced and with no children of her own, she sought companionship by marrying a third husband, an Arab man in his early sixties. Since he had lost his first wife, and his children were grown up and happily married, she found him to be a perfect match. However, she did not know about his jealousy and bad temper. One night, after attending a wedding, they returned home and got into an argument over a man who the husband thought was trying to seduce his wife. The argument ended when the husband struck his wife with his cane, which killed her. The husband confessed to the crime and was sent to prison for more than 13 years. He died only a few months after the King of Morocco commuted his sentence.

According to traditional beliefs in Morocco, all victims of murder go to Heaven. According to accounts of the Prophet Muhammad that are recorded in books of Hadith and in other works of tradition such as the *Muwatta* of Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 CE), a place is reserved in Paradise for those who have been murdered, for mothers who die in childbirth, for those who die as children, for those who die as unmarried youths, and for those who die on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Suicide, as we have seen, is a crime punishable by Hellfire. As for murderers, besides serving the sentence imposed on them by the courts, they must also repent for taking a life that only God has the right to take. This is done by fasting for two consecutive months, by feeding 60 poor people, or by saving the life of another to atone for their crime. Only thus can they hope to attain God's forgiveness.

These memories took me back to how the news of a death would change my father's countenance. I recalled the things he said when he heard that someone had died. I could almost hear him in the background, reciting the verses of the Qur'an that every Muslim recites upon hearing of a death. "Surely we belong to Allah, and to Him we shall return" (Qur'an 2:185); "Every soul shall taste death" (Qur'an 3:185; 21:35; 29:57); "Everything perishes but [God's] face" (Qur'an 28:88; 86:88); "Whoever is on Earth shall perish, but [God's] face alone shall remain forever" (Qur'an 55:26–27). My father took these verses to heart as unwavering truths and made sure that they would hold true for me as well.

I remembered how the news of a death would plunge my father into a state of deep reflection. I vividly recalled how my father's state of mind would prompt me to listen to everything he had to say about death, the rituals it occasioned and all the paradoxes and enigmas associated with it. It was during these intense moments that I learned the most about the subject of death.

In general terms, I learned that death was a part of life and that everything my mind could conceive and even the things I could not conceive would eventually perish. My father would say that even the Earth and the Heavens would eventually go through a sort of cosmic death, like every other created thing. Even the Angel of Death would face death himself.

THE EXPERIENCE OF DEATH IN ISLAMIC TRADITION

The ''delirium of death'' (*sakarat al-mawt*)—the moment in which the reality of death comes to one's consciousness (Qur'an 50:19)—was a matter of major concern for my father. He described it as a time of perplexity and bewilderment for the dying person—so much so, in fact, that one might even forget the *Shahada,* the Muslim Testimony of Faith.[2] At this point in the process of death, the soul reaches the collar bone (Qur'an 75:26) and then it rises up into the throat (Qur'an 56:83). The entire body feels as if it has been drowned in a floodlike state (*ghamarat al-mawt*), and the angels stretch out their hands, asking that the soul be given to them (Qur'an 6:93). At this point, the soul is about to escape from the body and the end is rapidly drawing near.

If I were to be with a person when such an event happened, my father's advice to me was to observe the following rules. Never leave the dying person alone, so that he will be safeguarded against Satan's temptation. Make sure that the dying person's head is facing the direction of the *Qibla*. Assume a state of calm and serenity; make sure to keep children away from him and do not allow any loud lamentations by women to disturb him. Remind the dying person to utter the Testimony of Faith (*al-Shahada*): ''I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.'' Once this is done, no further request to make the *Shahada* should be made. Apply drops of water to the dying person's mouth to quench the intense thirst that comes upon him at such moments. Doing so will help bring relief. At all times, trust that God's mercy and goodness will prevail over His wrath, and make sure to convey this to the dying person so that he will have positive thoughts about God. Thinking positive thoughts about God is the ''price of Heaven'' (*thaman al-janna*) and repentance is the ''key to Heaven'' (*miftah al-janna*).[3] The sweat on the forehead of the dying person is a good sign because it indicates that his suffering will soon be over and that the end is near. If these rules are implemented, my father would say, the transition from the physical world to the Angelic Realm would be smoother and less painful.

My father would then describe the threshold between life and death where the physical world vanishes, and the Angelic Realm (*'alam al-malakut*) is unveiled. This threshold is marked by the descent of angels from Heaven,

dressed in white, with faces gleaming like shining suns. They come down from Heaven with a white silk shroud (*kufn)* and sweet, fragrant musk to wrap and anoint the soul of the believer after it submits itself in peace.[4] My father would say that every year on the fourteenth day of the Islamic month of Sha'ban, leaves from the Lote Tree of Heaven, inscribed with the names of those destined to die, fall to Earth. These leaves are collected by Azra'il, the Angel of Death, whose task is to collect the souls and bring them back to their Lord. "Say: The Angel of Death, who is responsible for you, will gather you up and return you to your Lord" (Qur'an 32:11).

At the time of death, the Angel of Death comes to the dying person and conveys God's greetings of peace (Qur'an 33:44). Then he sits by the person's head, addresses the soul, and asks it to surrender itself in peace. According to traditional Islamic belief, the soul of the believer (*mu'min*) will slip away quickly and easily, like water jetting from a waterskin. However, the soul of the unbeliever (*kafir*), who rejects God's truth and resists the reality of death, will shriek in protest before it finally yields itself.[5]

The "pulling out of the soul" (*naz' al-ruh*) from the body, which is undertaken by the Angel of Death, marks the relinquishing of physical life and is the most agonizing of the pains that death inflicts. It is at this stage, my father said, that the soul (*ruh*), the essence of the human being that was created before its association with the body,[6] feels the pain caused by the Angel of Death pulling it away from its earthly abode. According to Islamic tradition, the soul's true home is in the Angelic Realm, although it becomes habituated to life on Earth through association with the body. The association of body and soul starts in the womb, continues after birth, and does not end until death. However, the fact that this is a semirelationship and not a relationship of identity is revealed in sleep, when the soul's connection with the body is loosened,[7] and in death, when the soul actually leaves the body and ascends to the Angelic Realm.

THE SOUL AND ITS ASCENT

Once the process of physical death has taken place, the Soul at Peace (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*)—the righteous soul called by God to return "well pleased and pleasing unto Him" (Qur'an 89:27–28)—embarks on its ascension through the seven Heavens escorted by angels.[8] These angels, the number of which my father would put between two and four, first take the soul past all of the bygone communities of humankind ("scattered about like swarms of locusts") before they reach the first Heaven.[9]

When the angels arrive at the first Heaven, they knock at its gate. When asked, "Who are you?" they reveal their identity and introduce the soul they are escorting. They testify that the soul is that of a believer whose creed (*'aqida*) is intact and free from associating partners with God (*shirk*). At the

gate of the second Heaven, the angels praise the person's observance of the five daily prayers. At the third Heaven, the person's charitable deeds are commended. At the fourth Heaven, the angels honor the person's practice of fasting. At the fifth Heaven, they attest that the person's pilgrimage to Mecca was done with the best of intentions. At the sixth Heaven, they mention the care and respect that the person showed to her parents. Finally, at the seventh Heaven, they testify that the person's repentance for her sins was genuine.[10]

Having passed successfully through the gates of the seven Heavens, the soul celebrates its arrival at the Uppermost Heaven (*ʿIliyyin*), where it sees its name inscribed on the register that is kept until Resurrection Day. This highest Heaven is also known as the Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary (*Sidrat al-Muntaha'*).[11] Here, the soul attains its closest proximity to the Divine Presence. My father would never speculate on whether the soul actually witnesses God. However, he would say that the physical death of the body is not real death. True death is in reaching a higher level of consciousness through the annihilation of selfhood. Once the soul is annihilated from itself, it loses all sense of identity and subsists in God (*al-fana' wa al-baqa' fi Allah*).

My father preferred not to talk about what happens to the soul of the unbeliever or evil person. Instead of ascending through the seven Heavens in peace, the soul of the evil person would receive a terrible reception from the frightful and horrible angels of Hell. These angels would wrap the soul in a shroud made of coarse hair, smear awful smelling substances onto it, and then try to ascend with it through the seven Heavens, only to be denied entry through their gates.[12] Eventually, the evil soul would slip out of their hands and drop into Hellfire.[13]

At this point, the car in which we were riding suddenly swerved to avoid hitting another car. This brought me out of my reverie and back to the reality of where I was. I noticed that the traffic was still moving slowly and that much time would have to pass before we arrived at the funeral home.

I then remembered that the soul would have to be brought back to Earth once again to join with the body while it was being washed and prepared for burial. The soul also had to be with the body for the Interrogation in the Grave, after which it would remove itself to a medial station called the *Barzakh,* the "interval," or "isthmus." In the Qur'an, the Barzakh is a barrier set up by God to keep two bodies of water separate and distinct (Qur'an 25:53). In Islamic eschatology, the term refers to the separation between the world of the dead and the world of the living. Once they have arrived at the Barzakh, the dead do not return to the world of the living. While there, the soul awaits the coming of the Hour (*al-Saʿa*). At the coming of the Hour, the soul unites again with the body to be resurrected and to stand before God on Judgment Day. Denying the coming of the Hour means denying God's justice and acknowledging the dominion of evil

(Qur'an 25:11). My father would say in Moroccan dialect, "Were it not for the Hour, the evil ones (literally, "the bastards") would succeed" (*Law kan ma kantsh al-Sa'a, lasilku ulad al-haram*).

My father said that the body without the soul is nothing more than flesh and bones. It will perish and later it will be consumed by worms. The soul, he would clarify, is what allows the dead to be conscious of what goes on around them (Qur'an 35:22). Those who care for the body after death must be aware that the dead person can hear and feel everything they say or do. Thus, they must take care to say or do nothing that would disturb the soul's tranquility.

THE WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

Forest Lawn Cemetery and Hollywood Mortuary started to appear from afar. I could see from the window of the car that we would soon arrive at our destination. I thought if my parents were still alive, and if I were to share with them my shock upon hearing the news of the young woman's death and the experience I was about to undergo, what would their advice be? At that moment, I imagined my father reminding me of the following Qur'anic verses: "No soul can die except by Allah's leave and at a time appointed" (Qur'an 3:145); "No soul knows in what land it will die" (Qur'an 31:34); "Wherever you may be, death will overtake you" (Qur'an 4:78). He would also have mentioned the following Hadith as a comfort for those who were left behind: "A sudden death is a solace for the faithful but a sorrow for the unbeliever."[14]

My beloved mother was a woman of few words. Rather than giving long explanations, she would probably have used a pointed Moroccan aphorism: "Grave-diggers and burial providers can be found in every land" (*haffar u daffan fi kull al-bled*). Being known for her wisdom, she might have added, "Pursue your happiness wherever it might be. Spread through God's land and seek His bounty (Qur'an 62:10), and never worry about who will be there to care for your remains when your appointed time comes." This was an adventurous statement, especially since it came from a woman who seldom left her house! Thinking of my mother, I could see what had motivated me to seek my happiness in faraway lands and to end up settling in the United States.

I took the Qur'anic verses that my father referred to as a warning not to question the will of God for taking a young life prematurely and to content myself with serving as one of those "body washers and burial providers" that my mother alluded to in her astute dictum. I also came to realize how my conception of the Last Day (*al-Yawm al-Akhir*) as a fundamental article of the Islamic faith along with belief in God, His angels, His Books, and His Messengers (Qur'an 4:136) had moved me to a higher and deeper level of understanding than before.

My parents' warnings against being oblivious to the reality of the Hereafter and not allowing myself to be seduced by the deceptions of the material world (*al-ghurur*) now made more sense to me than before.[15] I could see this as a valuable lesson worth passing on to my young daughter as well. I appreciated my parents' advice to guard against the temptations of the material world (*al-dunya*) and to stay focused only on what would be of benefit in the Hereafter (*al-akhira*).[16] My parents inspired me to emulate those whose hearts live in constant remembrance of God, who do not hate or fear death but perceive it as an opportunity that the soul takes to escape from worldly existence into the divine realm.[17] My father likened the soul's escape from the world through the annihilation of selfhood to a metaphorical ''death'' before physical death. By teaching me that one could realize such an annihilation in prayer, in living the Word of God through the Qur'an, and in embodying the Prophet Muhammad's character through the Sunna, he brought me to a better understanding of what was meant by the concept of mystical death. Without this sensation, my father would say, life as we understood it would be devoid of meaning.

Being in proximity to Forest Lawn Cemetery made me think of the answers that the dead are supposed to give to the questions asked of them in the grave by Nakir and Munkir, the two Interrogating Angels. Softly, the phrases, ''Allah is my Lord (*Allahu Rabbi*), the Qur'an is my Book (*al-Qur'anu Kitabi*), Muhammad is my Prophet (*Muhammadun Nabiyyi*), Islam is my Religion (*al-Islamu Dini*),'' came out of my mouth. I felt a great sense of relief because remembering these words gave me the assurance that, were I to be the one that had died and were I to be the one to be interrogated in the grave, I would have passed my first test on the journey to the Hereafter. These four statements, which every Muslim must know by heart, are believed to be the key to deliverance from the torments of the grave. Failure to answer them correctly would result in frightful encounters with vipers, scorpions, and all sorts of chastisements and afflictions that are unbearable for any human soul.

TERRORS OF THE GRAVEYARD

The sight of the well-kept graves covering a huge area of Forest Lawn Cemetery brought back memories of many frightening cemetery stories that I heard when I was a child. Some of these stories instilled in me a great fear of visiting cemeteries, especially at night. Their moral teachings, while bringing those who have sinned to be accountable for their wrongdoings, rely on fear as a preventive measure and encourage the young to avoid such sins in their own lives.

The sinners who are the subjects of cemetery stories include those who break their fast during the month of Ramadan, who show no mercy toward

their frail and elderly parents, who are unfair to orphans and never care for the poor or the needy, and who commit major sins such as theft or murder. All sinners receive punishments that are commensurate with their wrongdoings. Such punishments might include wild beasts appearing at their graves at nightfall to terrorize them. Some tombs might be set ablaze, and vipers and scorpions might cohabit with the bodies in their graves. Even the Earth itself might take revenge on them and would say to them, ''You have had much fun on my surface, but today you will suffer inside of me. You used to delight in all kinds of delicacies on my surface, but today the worms will eat you inside of me.''[18]

These punishments will continue until the Gathering of Bodies (*hashr al-ajsad*) on Judgment Day, which the Qur'an also refers to as the ''Day of Separation'' (*yawm al-fasl*).[19] The Balance (*mizan*), the scale that weighs the deeds of every individual, will be the measure through which justice is dispensed. ''Allah it is who has revealed the Scripture with the Truth and the Balance. How can you know? It may mean that the hour is nigh'' (Qur'an 42:17); ''As for him whose scales are heavy [with good works], he will have a pleasant life [in the Hereafter]. But as for him whose scales are light, the Bereft and Hungry one [Satan] will be his mother. Ah, what will convey unto you what she is—Raging Fire'' (Qur'an 101:6–11). The Bridge of Hell (*Sirat al-Jahim*), starting at the door of Hell and comparable in its thinness to the finest hair, will be crossed by every human soul that desires to get to Heaven. ''Gather together those who did wrong, along with their wives and that which they used to worship instead of Allah. Lead them to the Bridge of Hell, and then stop them, for they must be interrogated'' (Qur'an 37:22–24). Those without sin will cross the Bridge as lightly as a feather and will attain Heaven and all the benefits it entails. Failure to cross the Bridge will result in the soul falling down to *Jahannam* (similar to the Hebrew *Gehennah*), the top layer of Hell, and all the nightmares that go with it.[20]

When I was a child, the two cemetery stories that frightened me the most and made the greatest impression on me were ''The She-Mule of the Graveyard'' (*baghlat al-qubur*) and '''Ali Wants His Hand Back'' (*'Ali bgha yaditu*). Both stories were narrated by candlelight or around the fireplace during the long cold nights of winter in the Middle Atlas Mountains. The storyteller, a woman from the Sahara desert who was known to perform wonders with her words, would receive gifts for her expertise, and her dedicated audience, both young and old, would honor her with respectful silence and complete attention.

Thursday night was the night dedicated to storytelling. My father's regular weekly travel freed the day for my mother to invite my aunts over to our house, along with their daughters and some of my mother's female neighbors, one of whom was the storyteller. The gathering would start after dinner and would not end until it was almost dawn, for my mother's objective was to get as many extra hands as she could to help with the wool carding, spinning,

or weaving that she wanted to finish that evening. Listening to these stories provided our entertainment, and their length affected the degree of our productivity. Hot and sweet Moroccan tea, rich in caffeine, would be served to keep us all awake and alert. When my mother noticed that the heap of wool she had put out for carding and spinning was not going down fast enough, she would say, "Speak, but spin (*hadith u maghzil*)!" which was one of her favorite aphorisms.[21]

The story of the She-Mule of the Graveyard was about a widow who lost her husband, but who failed to keep herself chaste during the four-month and ten-day period (*ʿidda*) that every woman must observe after the death of a spouse. After her death, she was turned into a werewolf-like creature as a punishment for her sins. According to Moroccan tradition, during the period of grieving a widow must wear only white, she must never leave her house after dark, and she must not wear makeup nor dye her hair with henna. Above all, according to Islamic law, she must not have sexual relations with anyone. Islamic law is strict about making the *ʿidda* period mandatory to ensure that any child conceived by the husband before his death will be acknowledged as his heir. If the widowed woman is accused of having sex with a man during this period, the matter must be settled in the courts. The concern of the law is for the rights of the child, who in Islam takes the father's family name and has specific rights of inheritance. Failure to observe such a rule would result in the kinds of "Who's my daddy?" controversies that one sees on daytime TV talk shows in the United States. Since DNA testing is not available in most Muslim countries, other means, such as the *ʿidda* waiting period, have to be used to ensure that a child born after the death of a husband is actually his.

The story of the She-Mule of the Graveyard is meant to dissuade girls from ever thinking of cheating on their husbands, whether they are alive or dead. No girl would want to see her body transformed into this werewolf-like creature after sinning in such a way. The storyteller described the transformation of the She-Mule of the Graveyard as an excruciatingly painful process. As she emerged from beneath the dirt and stones that covered her grave, every limb and extremity of her body would be broken and bruised repeatedly. She would emerge from her grave on the fourteenth of every lunar month, when the moon is at its brightest. Each time this happened, she would undergo the same tortures and would emerge from the grave resembling a mule. She would be heavily shackled with chains from head to toe. The chains would cause great pain to her bruised body and their rattling sound would reveal her accursed nature to the living. Her beastly appearance, with eyes like balls of fire and long sharp teeth ready to inflict vampirelike bites on anyone who crossed her path, were meant as a warning for sexual transgressors. Those who lived pure lives were immune from any harm she might cause. The main victims of this creature were men who committed the sin of having sex with a widowed woman, thus transgressing the boundaries of a sacred period set by

Islamic law. Those who were bitten by the She-Mule of the Graveyard were robbed of their masculinity and rendered impotent, sometimes for the rest of their lives.

"'Ali Wants His Hand Back" was about a woman who had procured the hand of a dead man named 'Ali. She procured it for the magical powers she was told it would have over her husband's love for her. Having paid a large amount of money for the hand to the man who had washed 'Ali's body for burial, she put it inside her husband's pillow after making sure that 'Ali's burial had been completed without anyone being aware that the hand was missing. At this point in this story, when each of the listeners was thinking of what would come next, the storyteller brought 'Ali himself into the picture. She described how he emerged from the grave shrouded in white, on the night of the day he was buried, and made us walk with him to the woman's house to reclaim his hand.

He needed his hand in order to undergo the Interrogation in the Grave by the angels Nakir and Munkir. In Islam, the resurrection of the dead cannot take place unless the body is intact. We all felt sad for 'Ali and were curious about what the woman's husband would say or do when he found out what his wife had done. 'Ali knocked at the woman's door all night, repeatedly pleading for her to give his hand back. As she described 'Ali's actions, the storyteller would have us repeat this refrain: "'Ali wants his hand back. He wants it before the new day dawns." We would repeat this again and again, pleading along with 'Ali to restore his hand so that he could escape from the torments of the grave. Finally, just before dawn, the woman relented and confessed to her husband what she had done. 'Ali got back his hand, and the storyteller had us recite in celebration the answers that 'Ali would need in order to free himself from the grave: "Allah is my Lord, the Qur'an is my Book, Muhammad is my Prophet, and Islam is my Religion."

The issue of accountability is of paramount importance in Islam. All of creation is governed by a just God that sees to it that everything, including the universe itself, will answer to Him. In the story of 'Ali Wants His Hand Back, the particularity of such accountability lies within the human being as a microcosm, where one's limbs are brought forth to testify on the person's behalf as stated in the Qur'an: "On the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against their actions" (Qur'an 24:24). Thinking about the bodies and extremities in these stories brought me back to the body I was about to wash and prepare for burial.

WASHING AND PREPARING THE BODY FOR BURIAL

The director of the Islamic Center broke our silence by announcing that we should be ready to get out of the car and head to the mortuary, where the body was. He reminded his wife not to forget the bag containing the

towels, the gloves, the sheets, the shampoo, the musk, and anything else that was necessary for washing and preparing the body for burial. He asked me to bring the tape recorder containing the tape with the appropriate Qur'anic verses that are customarily recited while the washing of the body takes place.[22] He also handed me a few sheets of paper containing instructions for performing the washing of the deceased according to Islamic principles.[23] The requirements for washing a body in Islam are as follows:

1. The person washing the body must be a Muslim.
2. The person performing the washing must be in a state of purity. He or she must have made their ablution before they start washing the body of the deceased.
3. A woman who has just given birth is exempt from washing bodies.
4. A woman who is having her menstrual period is not allowed to wash a body.
5. If the deceased is male, his washing must be performed by a male.
6. If the deceased is female, the washing of her body must be done by a female.
7. Husbands are allowed to wash the bodies of their wives.
8. Wives are allowed to wash the bodies of their husbands.

Preparing a body for burial is a process that requires preparation and the right materials. To prepare the body of the young bride for burial, the director's wife brought three towels to preserve her modesty: one towel was to cover the woman's breasts, another was to cover her private parts, and another was to cover the backside of the woman when she was turned over. A man would need only two towels to preserve his modesty. She also brought two other towels to dry the body after washing. In the United States, it is also customary to bring latex gloves to wear during the preparation of the body, a large sheet of plastic to put under the body, and a pair of scissors to cut the burial shroud. Other required items include soap to wash the body, shampoo to wash the dead person's hair, and musk to anoint the body. If musk is not available, an oil-based, nonalcoholic perfume is acceptable. The burial shroud (*kufn*) requires three sheets for a male and five sheets for a female. The sheets must be without a hem and made of white cotton. Nowadays, twin sheets are used for most people, but queen sheets may be used for a large person. The edges of hemmed sheets can be removed with scissors. Any sewing, seams, or embroidery on the sheets must be removed as well.

Before preparing the body for burial, it must be placed on high table, with the face up. In the United States, the best-equipped place for such a task is a funeral home. Muslims have been using such facilities for many years now, and their needs have been accommodated accordingly. The first step is to undress the body of the deceased while making sure that the private parts remain covered at all times. A large piece of plastic and paper towels are put under the hips to collect any rectal or urinary discharges. After undressing the body, the person who prepares the body for burial presses the stomach

gently to get rid of any discharges. The soiled plastic and paper towels are discarded in a garbage bag along with the first pair of latex gloves, and the bag is sealed.

The preparer next washes her hands, puts on a new pair of gloves, and performs the ablution (*wudu'*) of the body. She starts by cleaning the teeth and the inside of the nose, and then performs the following ritual ablutions. These ablutions are similar to those done by a living person, with a few minor variations:

- Wash the hands up to the wrist three times (right hand first, then left).
- Put water over the mouth three times. A living person would rinse the inside of the mouth.
- Put water over the nostrils three times. A living person would wash the inside of the nostrils.
- Wash the face from the forehead to the chin and from ear to ear three times.
- Wash the forearms up to the elbow three times, right first, then left.
- Wipe with a wet hand over the whole of the head once only.
- Wash the feet up to the ankles three times, right, then left.

The Center director's wife then filled the mouth, ears, nose, and eyes of the deceased bride with cotton to prevent water from entering her body. She next washed the body with a washcloth and soap three times, first on the right side, then on the left. If the body is still not clean after the first washing, it may be washed as many times as needed. However, the number of washings must always be an odd number: one washing, three washings, five washings, and so on. To preserve the modesty of the dead person, one must not remove the towels covering the private parts but must wash under them. The last washings must be done without soap. For example, if washings one and two are done using soap, washings four and five must be done with plain water. Rinsing the body should be done by pouring the water gently over the body: the right side first, then the left side, then the right side again, then the left side. The last rinse must be done with scented or perfumed water.

The director's wife then shampooed and washed the hair of the young woman three times and rinsed it well. A woman's hair may be braided in three braids or placed to the sides or to the back. For men, the hair is simply combed neatly. Next, she removed the cotton that was used to cover the body openings and discarded it in the garbage bag, along with her second pair of gloves. Putting on a third pair of gloves, she dried the body with clean towels. Finally, she put musk on the woman's head, forehead, nose, hands, knees, eyelids, and armpits and placed perfumed cotton on her private parts. While, she was preparing the body, the tape deck was playing recitations of the Qur'an. Thinking about these procedures made me realize how unchanged they have remained throughout more than 14 centuries of

Islamic history. With the exception of a few modern additions such as latex gloves, plastic bags, and a tape deck, little of the ritual of washing and preparing the body for burial has changed over time. A major reason for this is that most of these rituals are preserved in the collections of Hadith.

For example, Umm 'Atiyya reported that when Zaynab, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad died, the Prophet said: "Wash her an odd number of times, and put camphor or something similar on her body at the fifth washing." Upon completing this task, the women informed the Prophet that they had done as he had asked. Then he gave them his undergarment and said, "Put it next to her body." The women then braided Zaynab's hair in three plaits, two on the sides of her head and one on her forehead. Following the instructions of the Prophet, every task must start from the right side, and with those parts of the body upon which ablution is performed.[24] A common addition to this procedure is to add some water from the well of Zam Zam in the Sacred Mosque of Mecca to the water that is used to wash the body for burial, if such water is available.

The process of shrouding and covering the body has also changed little over time. The Prophet's wife 'A'isha reported that when the Messenger of God died, he was first shrouded in a material from Yemen. Then it was removed from him and he was shrouded in three sheets of white Yemeni cotton. The cloth was said to have been not from a garment or a turban.[25] In modern times, white cotton bed sheets are often used in place of bolts of white cotton cloth. Often, people making the pilgrimage to Mecca bring their burial shrouds from Mecca or buy them for friends and family members as gifts.

When we wrapped the body of the young woman who had died on her honeymoon, we used five sheets to make the burial shroud. First, we cut two sheets in half, which gave us four pieces of cotton cloth. We cut a hole in the center of one piece, large enough to go over the waist of the dead woman. This piece is to be slipped over the head and pulled down to the waist to act as a sort of pajama bottom. We cut a second hole in the center of another piece of cloth, large enough to fit over her head. This piece was to act as a sort of blouse, covering her chest. We next cut long, thin strips of the third piece to be used as ties. Any remaining cloth from this piece would be used as a scarf to cover the head. The fourth piece of cloth was kept as a snug-fitting wrap to go around the bosom.

The mortuary had provided us with a simple wooden casket in which to place the body. We put one of the tie strips in the bottom of the casket and then placed a whole sheet in the casket to be used as the outer sheet of the shroud. We then used another sheet for the first wrapping of the body. We closed the sheet around the body from head to toe, covering the face, and tied it off at the top of the head, the waist, and the feet. Then we took the half sheet with the larger hole, put it over her head and shoulders, and pulled it down to her waist, until the bottom of the cloth touched her ankles. Then

we took the half sheet with the smaller hole and pulled over her head, fixing it like a blouse. We next took the third half sheet and wrapped it tightly around her bosom area. The final piece of cloth was folded into a triangle and placed on the woman's head like a scarf. This was folded under the chin. Finally, we lifted the body and placed it in the casket on the last sheet, face up. We closed the sheet completely around the body and tied it at the waist. Then we faced the body in the direction of Mecca and closed the casket.

When I entered Forest Lawn Mortuary for the first time, I was so shocked by the sight of the bodies laid out for embalming that I could feel my head spinning. When we arrived where the body of the young bride was, I could not bear to look at her. The Center director noticed how pale I was and immediately made me sniff some perfume. I felt like running out of the mortuary, but I could not do so. Because I had been called upon to take care of somebody that needed real help, I did not have the luxury to feel sorry for myself. I could not allow my ego to distract me from my sense of duty. After that first time at the mortuary, I was able to prepare other bodies for burial, including the bodies of children, without thinking of myself. Instead, I spent my preparation time silently asking God to grant the deceased mercy and peace.

THE FUNERAL PRAYER (*SALAT AL-JANAZA*)

Unlike the daily canonical prayers in Islam, funeral prayers do not require bending at the waist (*sujud*) or prostration (*ruku'*). The entire prayer is done while standing. Typically, the prayer is led by the Imam of the mosque where the deceased person used to worship most frequently, but the prayer can be led by any qualified person. In the case of the Canadian bride who died in Los Angeles, the director of the Islamic Center of Southern California led the funeral prayer. During the funeral prayer, the men stand in lines at the front, and women stand in lines at the back.

When the funeral prayer is performed, the body of the deceased is placed in front of the Imam. The Imam positions himself behind the middle of the casket if the deceased is a woman and by the left shoulder if the deceased is a man. The funeral prayer is begun like the regular *Salat* prayer, by raising the hands and saying, "God is greatest" (*Allahu akbar*). Then the Imam and those who pray behind him quietly recite *Surat al-Fatiha,* the opening Sura of the Qur'an:

> All praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,
> The Beneficent, the Merciful,
> Master of the Day of Judgment.
> You alone do we worship,
> And to You alone do we turn for aid.
> Guide us to the Straight Way,

The way of those of whom You are satisfied,
Not of those who have angered You,
Nor of those who have gone astray.

(Qur'an 1:1–7)

The Imam and the congregation then say, "God is greatest" a second time but without raising the hands. After this, they make the *tashahud,* the recitation of the *Shahada* in the prayer: "I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." They then say "God is greatest" a third time, without raising the hands. At this point in the prayer, all who are present make a silent supplication for the soul of the deceased. Then they say, "God is greatest" a fourth time and make a supplication for all Muslims. The prayer finishes with the congregation following the Imam in saying, "Peace be unto you" (*al-salamu ʿalaykum*), first to the right side and then to the left side.

After the funerary prayers were over, the husband of the deceased woman was sad but relieved to be able to return to Canada, where he would join with his family and that of his wife to observe the bereavement warranted by such a tragedy. On the way back to the Islamic Center, I remembered how neighbors and extended family members would take over the household of the family of the deceased. They would provide a fried Moroccan bread called *milwi* and hot tea for the large numbers of people, whether friends, acquaintances, or enemies, that would come from all over to present their condolences. During this time, enmities would be forgotten and the event would create an opportunity for people to make peace among each other. The family also used this time to take care of the legal matters associated with the loss of a loved one.

On the third day after the funeral, the family would observe two important rituals. Early in the morning they would visit the grave and give *milwi* soaked in butter, dates, and water to those who accompanied them to the cemetery and to anyone they met on the way. At the cemetery, they would recite some verses of the Qur'an or hire someone who had memorized the Qur'an to recite verses on behalf of the deceased. At night, they would prepare a huge and costly meal and invite the community to come and celebrate the memory of the deceased. Neighbors, extended family members, friends, and even strangers would help with the cooking and with the meal expenses. Such a communal event brings people together to care for each other in a very compassionate way. Humor, but without vulgarity, is often used at such events to bring solace to the family of the deceased.

On the fortieth day after the funeral, family members and friends pay another visit to the family of the deceased. As on the third day, a feast is held and Qur'an reciters are hired. When my father died, I was in the United States and could not be present on time to attend his funeral.

To commemorate his death, the Islamic Center held a funerary prayer for him and people shared their own experiences of coping with distance and loss far away from their communities back home. In place of my family in Morocco, I relied on my friends from Los Angeles and the Islamic Center, who cooked for my family and me and brought me comfort and sympathy.

Life in America has taught me much, but none of the lessons I have learned have been as significant as the lessons I learned when dealing with death in a faraway land. I was amazed to see how much tradition mattered to my fellow Muslims who had lost loved ones in their home countries. No matter how secular they might be in their daily lives, and regardless of their religious inclination or ethnicity within Islam—whether Iranian Shiite, American Sufi, or North African Sunni—when they faced the loss of a loved one, they all wanted the rituals to be performed according to the strict observance of the Qur'an, Sunna, and tradition. My experience of working in the Islamic Center of Southern California taught me that the majority of Muslims in the United States take religion most seriously at three crossroads in their lives: at marriage, childbirth, and death. At such times, even people who make a point of being "modern" and rational in their day-to-day occupations fall back on the support and solace of tradition. When I see modern Muslim ideologues attempting to reform Islam by dismissing traditional practices as "superstitious" or "ignorant," I wonder what they will rely on when death and tragedy overtake them. The "human margin" of religion can be both a curse and a blessing. Sometimes, tradition can create its own tragedies, such as when a modern Anglo-Pakistani executive marries off his daughter, who has never been to Pakistan, to an unknown man from his native village in Punjab. However, at other times, such as moments of death and loss, the lack of tradition creates an emptiness and sterility that leaves the heart desolate and bereft of solace. As this chapter has shown, I am grateful for the traditions I have learned from many people in my native town and region, both literate and illiterate. What continues to amaze me is how much these traditions not only resonate with but also follow the teachings of Islam as they have unfolded throughout history.

NOTES

1. The Qur'an says about martyrs, "And say not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, 'They are dead.' Nay, they are living, although you do not perceive it" (2:154).

2. In a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad says, "Oh God, please help me bear the delirium of death." See, for example, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), vol. 4, 461–465.

3. Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet Muhammad said: "One must not die unless he holds positive thoughts about God. Verily, trusting in Allah's goodness is the Price of Heaven." Shams al-Din ibn Abi 'Abdallah Muhammad al-Qurtubi

(d. 671/1272–3), *Al-Tadhkira fi ahwal al-mawta wa umur al-akhira,* ed., Muhammad ʻAbd al-Salam Ibrahim (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyya, 1421/2000), vol. 1, 27.

4. "And there will come forth every soul; with each will be [an angel] to drive it, and [an angel] to bear witness for it" (Qur'an 50:21). See also, *The Message of the Qur'an,* transl. and annot. Muhammad Asad, 2nd ed. (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 798. Asad interprets the "driver" (*sa'iq*) and the "witness" (*shahid*) in this verse as not meaning angels, but psychological constructs: "And every human being will come forward with [his erstwhile] inner urges and [his] conscious mind" (n. 13 and n. 14).

5. Shams al-Din Abu Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 701/1301–2), *al-Ruh,* ed., al-Dimashqi (Amman, Jordan: Maktabat Dandis, 2001), 69.

6. This fourth stage in the creation of the human being is distinguished by God's spirit being breathed into humankind. "Then [God] fashioned [the human being] and breathed His Spirit into him" (Qur'an 32:9). "They ask you about the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit comes from God's command'" (17:85).

7. Sleep, in Moroccan culture, is said to be the "little brother" of death. I remember my mother referring to death and saying that death had "a foolish little brother" called sleep, who never gets to finish the job he starts.

8. "You shall surely ascend from one heaven to another heaven" (Qur'an 84:19); also, "[God] who has created the seven heavens one above another" (Qur'an 67:3).

9. Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkira,* vol. 1, 50.

10. Ibid., 50–51.

11. "Near the Lote-Tree beyond which none may pass" (Qur'an 53:14).

12. "For those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance, no opening will there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they enter the Garden, until a camel can pass through the eye of the needle. Such is Our reward for those in sin" (Qur'an 7:40).

13. "If anyone assigns partners to God, he is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped and thrown him into a far-distant place" (Qur'an 22:31). A fierce blast of wind, the wrath of God, comes and snatches the soul away and throws it into a place far from anywhere one could imagine, into the Hell of those who defy God. See Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an,* 859 n. 2806.

14. Qurtubi, *al-Tadhkira,* vol. 1, 26; this hadith comes from the collections of Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi.

15. *Al-Ghurur* is a term that the Qur'an uses to describe the multilayered self-deception of the person who is involved with the particularities of the material world and who forgets about the realities of the Hereafter. See Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis, Minnesota and Chicago, Illinois: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 107.

16. The literal meaning of the Arabic word *dunya* is "that which is very near," in other words, an immediate objective, the "here and now" of life. *Al-Akhira,* on the other hand, means, "that which comes at the end," the long-range results of the human being's life on earth.

17. The Qur'an refers to such people as "those for whom neither trade nor commerce can divert them form the remembrance [of Allah]" (24:37).

18. This tradition goes back in time to medieval Islam. See Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), 39.

19. Qur'an 37:20–21; on Judgment Day, our limbs and faculties will be the strongest witnesses against us if we use them for evil purposes instead of the good purposes for which they were given to us. "On the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against them and their actions" (24:24).

20. Smith and Haddad, *Death and Resurrection,* 78–79.

21. "Speak but spin!" is a Moroccan aphorism that connotes doing multiple tasks at once, and it is used in many contexts outside of the home. In the present case, my mother used it as a reminder to follow the story, but stay focused on the task. It is equivalent to the American saying, "Walk, and chew gum at the same time."

22. The most common Qur'anic Suras that are recited when washing bodies for burial are Sura 13 (*al-Ra'd,* The Thunder) and Sura 36 (*YaSin,* the Arabic letters Y and S).

23. In the United States and Europe, Islamic organizations have taken it upon themselves to provide handbooks for the preparation and burial of the Muslim dead. One such handbook is the *Islamic Funeral Handbook* (1991), produced by the Muslim community of Chicago, Illinois. Many people cooperated in the preparation of this handbook, including local Imams, attorneys, funeral directors, and representatives of the Chicago Board of Health.

24. See, for example, *Sahih Muslim,* trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (New Delhi, India: Kitab Bhavan, 1978), vol. 2, 446.

25. Ibid., 447.

12

Reflections on Death and Loss

Feisal Abdul Rauf

Great and important insights can be gained by understanding how those of another faith handle the experience of death. This chapter consists of two spontaneous reflections that were sent to the friends of the late Muhammad Abdul Rauf, a great Egyptian scholar and Imam, by his son Feisal and daughter-in-law, Daisy, bringing many to tears by the intimacy and dignity of the account. In a second letter of thanks for the condolences that the family received, the terrible tsunami disaster of December 2004 had just occurred in Indonesia and the Indian Ocean, and the Muslim reaction to this calamity is also expressed.

—Virginia Gray Henry–Blakemore, Volume Editor

A BEAUTIFUL END TO A LIFE'S JOURNEY

Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un.
(Verily we belong to God, and to Him is the return.)

As-Salamu 'Alaykum: (Peace and blessings be upon you:)

This is to announce the passing away of my very dear and much beloved father Muhammad Abdul Rauf, on Saturday December 11, 2004, at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., at 7:25 PM—just 16 days shy of his 87th birthday.

The last time I spoke to him was around 10:00 AM Thursday morning, the day of his medical emergency. He had called to tell me how much he found my latest book a continuation of his work and how much a source of pride it was for him. Then he prayed for God's blessings upon me. He was very lighthearted and extremely cheerful.

My wife Daisy saw him for the last time five days before that when she visited Washington, D.C., to be part of a women's conference hosted by

Karamah, headed by Dr. Azizah al-Hibri. Daisy found my father cheerful, remarked on the emptiness of his house, and noted that my father had donated away his library. He was preparing to visit Malaysia and then go to Egypt with my mother. He was obviously shedding his worldly attachments.

My father had frequently mentioned over the past year that his life's work was done. All he desired was to prepare himself for meeting his Lord. His thoughts revolved around making a final trip to his birthplace in Egypt, in order to die there and be buried next to his father in our village of Abusir Gharbiyya. It is apparent that he wanted to die a beautiful death, surrounded by us personally reciting the Qur'an for his soul's comfort in departing, for God ultimately arranged events toward that end.

My father was rushed from his home in Bethesda to the hospital on Thursday night (December 9) around 11:00 PM after he complained of abdominal pain and became unresponsive to my mother's entreaties. The doctors discovered that he had an aneurism of the abdominal branch of the aorta, a tear in the thinning wall of the artery that provides blood to the abdominal region. They were surprised to find him still alive; for this condition is one that normally results in fatality by the time the individual reaches the hospital. Following surgery and in spite of three doses of clotting factor and 30 units of blood transfusions, he was still hemorrhaging. Obviously his meeting with God was destined, a reality for which he was fully reconciled and prepared.

During this period, my father was generally aware of our presence. Although his eyes were closed, and he could neither speak nor move, I discovered that he was able to communicate to us by squeezing our hands in his softly clenched fists. From about 10:00 AM onwards, my brother Ayman, our dear friend Waleed Ansary, and other family members recited from the Qur'an, with frequent recitations of Sura Yasin (Qur'an 36). This Sura of the Qur'an was recommended by the Prophet to be recited for a soul in the throes of death; he called it the "Heart of the Qur'an." We also recited Surat al-Fath (Qur'an 48, The Victory), Surat al-Waqi'a (Qur'an 56, The Event of Judgment Day), Surat al-Mulk (Qur'an 67, The Kingdom), and other short Suras and assorted Qur'anic verses.

My father communicated to us by squeezing our hands. I learned to understand his special communiqués, such as squeezing my hand to express his desire and delight that I continued reciting the Qur'an to him. Five years ago, my father asked me to commit the time to recite the entire Qur'an to him so that he could ensure that I pronounced it with as perfect a *tajwid* (accuracy of pronunciation) as possible. We recorded the sessions, which continued on and off for about a year. His last published book was a book on *tajwid,* published in Malaysia. He also squeezed Daisy's hand whenever she mentioned news of the manuscript of his autobiography. This was the last work that he had been writing.

I recited continually until 6:30 PM, with my hand in his clasped hand, feeling his regular squeezing of my hand. That my father in a way "choreographed" how he wanted to pass on, surrounded by his family and with me reciting the Qur'an, was evidenced by a number of things. When we agreed with the doctors around 11:00 PM Friday night about the futility of giving my father more blood transfusions, their expectation was that he would pass away within a few hours. He did not. When at 4:30 PM the next day they stopped giving him the pressers to maintain his blood pressure, they thought he would pass away in minutes to an hour. His heart kept beating regularly and powerfully, to almost everyone's surprise, especially for an 87-year-old.

Finally, they decided to remove his respirator. I continued my final recitation of Sura Yasin holding his right hand and intoning it the way I knew he loved to hear it. My mother, Daisy, my daughters Leila and Amira, Waleed, and a few others also opted to remain in the room, holding his other hand and feet, with my mother moistening his mouth with water. He was now breathing on his own. He breathed softly and intermittently during that hour, as his heartbeat gyrated and began slowing down on the monitor. As I recited the eight-verse section ending with the words, *salamun qawlan min rabbin rahim* ("A greeting of peace from a Merciful Lord") his heartbeat flattened. Daisy patted my hand to point this out to me, and so we chanted this verse 111 times.

This eight-verse section of Sura Yasin (Qur'an 36:51–58) is worth repeating: "And when the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection shall blow, people shall rush forth to their Lord, Saying, 'Oh Woe unto us! Who has raised us up from our repose?' This is what the All-Merciful had promised, and the Messengers are now verified. It shall take no more than a single blast for them all to be brought up before Us! On this Day, a soul shall not be wronged in any way, nor shall you be rewarded except for what you did. Surely, the people of Paradise on this Day will be busy rejoicing with their spouses, reclining on shaded couches, enjoying therein fruit and whatever they ask for. A greeting of peace from a Merciful Lord!"

When I began to recite the next verse, Dad's heartbeat began to kick in on the monitor, to the delight of my mother. This was another of his communicative signs that he was indeed registering our presence and recitation, but this was also his final goodbye to us. His heartbeat slowed down within a minute, and I recited the remainder of the Sura. He died peacefully and beautifully, embraced by family and friends, among prayers and expressions of love and respect.

May Allah bless Dad's beautiful soul, forgive him for his shortcomings, forgive us for our shortcomings against him, and continue to reward him for the imprints of his good deeds that he left in the character and personality of the many whom he touched and taught.

My father was known for a religiosity steeped in and defined by deep spirituality and ethics. It was not a piety that was self-serving, but one that

delighted in improving and transforming others toward their best behavior while overlooking their shortcomings, for he knew that we humans are imperfect and flawed creatures. He was never vindictive, instead leaving those who wronged him to Divine justice, and considered his patience in the face of others' wrongdoings toward him a means of drawing down upon himself God's forgiveness for his own shortcomings. His years of service were marked by many delightful stories of how he sought to transform hatred into love and heal broken friendships and relationships. He behaved in this way toward all: from those who were at the highest level of government and academia, to his students and those behind him either chronologically or in the ladder of spiritual ethics.

These were the most important imprints of his life. As an Arab poet once said, *Hadhihi aatharuna tadullu ʿalayna. Faʾnzuru baʿdana ila-l-athari,* "These are our life-imprints, traces that point to us. So after our departure look at our life-imprints."

May the Benevolent Creator keep the blessings of Dad's life-imprints flowing upon us and admit him into the Divine Presence at the highest level of Intimacy, in the company of the Prophets and Saints.

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Daisy Khan Abdul Rauf, and the Sharkawi Family

UNDERSTANDING DISASTERS AND PERSONAL LOSS

January 12, 2005

As-Salamu ʿAlaykum,

To Our Very Dear Friends and Fellow Travelers on Life's Journey:

Our hearts are overflowing with enormous gratitude for your most generous outpouring of wishes, prayers, and goodwill in response to the news of my father Dr. Muhammad Abdul Rauf's passing on December 11, 2004. We wish we could personally thank every one of you for your most heartfelt sentiments.

Dad's fortieth day—marking the official end of mourning to which many Muslims traditionally adhere—falls on January 20, 2004, the evening in Islamic counting of the festival of *Eid ul-Adha,* an especially blessed day that marks Muslims' fulfillment of their required pilgrimage.

Many—even those who had never met Dad—expressed gratitude that we shared the narrative of Dad's last moments, and wrote to tell us of this. But we cannot ignore the news that precisely two weeks to the very hour after Dad's passing, more than 160,000 souls are now confirmed to have perished

in the South Asian tsunami. ‘‘How could the Merciful and Compassionate God that we all believe in allow such a calamity to happen?’’ is a question that many, even in the media, have raised. They want to know how believers in God, and especially the Muslims—since we were the hardest hit and suffered the most casualties—are taught to think about such events and come to grips with them.

The Prophet Muhammad taught that among those receiving Divine grace are all who die unexpectedly by drowning, in an earthquake, in a fire, a plague, or an epidemic, from a stomach disease, and including women who die in childbirth. All of these souls are considered to have witnessed the Truth, and thus they receive a heavenly rank. However, God anticipates our next question pertaining to the survivors of such calamities and hastens to remind us, ‘‘We shall certainly test you by some [combination] of fear, hunger, loss of worldly goods, of lives and of [labor’s] fruits. But assure those who are patient in adversity, who when calamity befalls them assert, ‘Verily we belong to God and verily we return to Him (*inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji‘un*).’ Upon these shall flow their Lord’s prayers and mercy, for they are guided’’ (Qur’an 2:155–157). This verse explains why Muslims urge their co-religionists who are touched by calamity to express patience (*sabr*) and utter these words of belonging to God and returning to Him. By complying with this Divine promise, we hope to merit God’s prayers, mercy, and guidance.

Like students taking college exams, we go through divine tests to achieve the rewards that accrue from doing well on them. Thus, the tests facing the survivors of disasters include: How will we respond? Will we be angry with God, or will we be grateful for the ultimate grace that God has promised for those who are taken into His mercy? How will we contend with our fear, hunger, loss of worldly goods, and the fruits of our life’s work? Can we remain steadfast in the face of adversity? Will we act in accordance with the best of what it means to be human: doing good, being compassionate and supportive to those who need our help, or will we be derailed from traversing the Way?

Some have suggested that modern man needs a Divine reminder and view the tsunami as a form of Divine scripture writ large on instant global television. They believe that the tsunami was meant to imprint onto our consciousness an image of the apocalypse, a terrifying time, according to the Qur’an, when the earth will quake, and ‘‘the seas swell and graves are scattered, with every soul keenly aware of what [deeds] it released and restrained’’ (Qur’an 84:3–5). These verses evoke an image that is intended to make human hearts receive and respond to the Divine sorrow and lament that God sustains for humanity, a humanity that is inattentive to the simultaneity of the overflowing of Divine mercy. God desires to forgive humans who are unaware of their need to ward off the Divine justice that confronts human responsibility. The final reminder in *Surat al-Infitar* (The Cleaving Asunder)

underscores what many felt that the tsunami served to remind us of: namely, Who it is that has always owned, and will forever own the ultimate control and final say over our lives: "So how will you fathom Judgment Day? Again, how will you fathom Judgment Day? It is a day when one soul has no control over another and the sole command that Day is God's" (Qur'an 84:17–19).

A man once came to the Prophet Muhammad, asking him when this "Hour" of the Apocalypse that presages the Last Day will occur. "How have you prepared yourself for it?" the Prophet asked. "By loving God and His Messenger," the man answered. To this, the Prophet earnestly replied, "You shall be with those whom you love [i.e. in his case in the company of God and His Messenger]." Our individual moment of death is our "Hour," our precursor to the Last Day, and we shall be in the company of those whom we have loved. May we all have loved our Creator and whomever of His Messengers whose practice we have adoringly followed!

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "There are seven kinds of martyr other than those killed in the way of Allah. One who is killed by the plague is a martyr, one who drowns is a martyr, one who dies of pleurisy is a martyr, one who dies of a disease of the belly is a martyr, one who dies by fire is a martyr, one who dies under a falling building is a martyr, and the woman who dies in childbirth is a martyr." (Malik ibn Anas, *al-Muwatta* 16.36). Some people asked, "Who else are they, Oh Messenger of Allah?" He said, "He who is killed fighting for Allah's cause is a martyr, he who dies in the cause of Allah is a martyr, he who dies in an epidemic is a martyr, he who dies from a stomach disease is a martyr, and he who dies of drowning is (also) a martyr." This hadith is narrated by Muslim.

Sa'id ibn Zayd reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "He who is killed while guarding his property is a martyr, he who is killed while defending himself is a martyr, he who is killed defending his religion is a martyr, and he who dies protecting his family is (also) a martyr." This hadith is narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Tirmidhi. The latter considers it a sound hadith.

Feisal and Daisy

13

Die before You Die

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

Die before You Die.

—Hadith of the Prophet

We're never far from the appetites of our body.
Our senses are ready to spring at the slightest touch.
We stand on a bloody field to survey the booty,
but once collected, it soon becomes too much.

We walk inside our flesh-case like a brush
wielded by a painter making rapid splashes,
filling empty scroll-sheets with the blush
of skin-tones come alive in lightning dashes.

Existence comes and goes in furtive flashes.
Nothing belongs to us. It's all on loan.
We are those fleshly bursts like fluttering lashes
that open and close on eyes, and then are gone.

If we could see our real deaths we might die.
To die while still alive wakes up the eye.

5 Ramadan

NOTE

This poem first appeared in Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, *The Ramadan Sonnets* (San Francisco and Bethesda, Maryland: City Lights/Jusoor Books, 1996). The work was reprinted from Jusoor/City Lights Books and republished in the Ecstatic Exchange Series. The poem is reproduced here by permission of the author.

14

Sufi Foundations of the Ethics of Social Life in Islam

Kenneth Lee Honerkamp

> Sufism is ethical conduct.
> Whoever surpasses you in ethical conduct
> Surpasses you in Sufism.
>
> —Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Kattani (d. 838 CE)

Ethics has been a central issue of scholarly discourse in the Muslim world for over fourteen centuries. However, it is not just centuries of scholarly discourse that make ethics an important issue for Islam today. We live in a time when the ethical values that have traditionally formed the foundation of Islamic societies have come under question. In the eyes of many, these values are in need of reevaluation. Globalization, political activism, and radical religious ideologies have forced upon many people a view of the world in which the only ethical options are a choice between secular humanism and a pragmatic ethics of survival. The rhetoric of the "Clash of Civilizations" has marked our communities today such that the spiritual roots that have traditionally defined the moral basis of society seem unrealistic and even childish. Many people now question whether any religious tradition can meet the needs of today's diverse and changing world. This dilemma is not unique to Islam. However, given the clear-cut framework from which Muslims have traditionally drawn their ethical inspiration—the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad—that such a dilemma should be facing the Muslim community at all today is disquieting.

This chapter focuses on the central role Sufism has played in the development of Islamic ethics. Sufism is rarely mentioned as a source of ethics, and the mentors of the Sufi path have almost been forgotten as ethical exemplars. In the following pages, the ethical teachings of the Sufis and their role in the formation and transmission of the ethical norms that have defined Islamic social life will be highlighted, in hopes of reintegrating this essential source

of knowledge into the ongoing discourse on Islamic values. In particular, this chapter delineates the manner in which Islamic spirituality interfaces with Sufi ethical discourse, using original source materials from early Sufi works. Finally, in hopes that the reader might gain firsthand knowledge of the teachings and methods that the Sufis bring to ethical discourse, this chapter focuses on the teachings of Abu ʻAbd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 CE), a well-known exemplar of ethical teachings on the Sufi path.

ETHICS AND THE SPIRIT

The earliest definitions of Sufism that have come down to us clearly align the teachings of Sufism with ethical conduct.[1] The word for ethical conduct in Arabic is *akhlaq*. Many Sufis of the formative period defined Sufism as *akhlaq*. Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 908 CE) said, "Sufism is neither formalized practices nor acquired sciences; rather, it is ethical conduct (*akhlaq*)."[2] In the words of Muhammad ibn ʻAli al-Kattani (d. 838 CE) quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "Sufism is ethical conduct (*akhlaq*). Whoever surpasses you in ethical conduct (*akhlaq*) surpasses you in Sufism."[3] In the following generation, Muhammad b. ʻAli al-Qassab defined Sufism in the following terms: "Sufism consists of noble conduct that is made manifest at a noble moment on the part of a noble person among a noble folk."[4] Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE), renowned as the Master of the Folk of the Sufi Path, portrayed Sufism as a process of purification that was like a journey: "Sufism is departure from base character and arrival at lofty character."[5] The focus on ethical conduct as the guiding principle behind Sufi practice has continued to resonate throughout the Muslim world. As recently as the eighteenth century, the Moroccan Sufi and scholar Ahmad Ibn ʻAjiba (d. 1809 CE)[6] defined Sufism as, "The science of learning the manner of journeying toward the presence of the King of Kings; or [one could say] inward purification from base tendencies and inward beautification with lofty character traits."[7]

Quotations like those cited above challenge the widely held opinion that Sufism is preoccupied only with metaphysics and mystical experience. On the contrary, the teachings of Sufism affirm that the experiential aspect of human existence is most meaningful when it is understood within a context of spiritual transformation that is based on a normative code of behavior (*adab*) and ethical conduct (*akhlaq*). Sufism teaches that spiritual transformation is inherent to humanity, although within the individual it is only a latent or virtual possibility. From an Islamic perspective, participation in this process of transformation is one of the functions of religious life. Through its core teachings of *akhlaq* and the living examples of Sufi shaykhs, Sufism has played an important role in transmitting the ethical values of Islamic society.

Ruh is the Arabic term for spirit or soul, the substantial or essential aspect of the human being. The Arabic term *ruhaniyyat* refers to the teachings of Islam that deal most directly with the spirit. From the Sufi perspective, spirit

defines the human condition, on the one hand, and is the essential substance of the process of spiritual transformation, on the other hand. When speaking of spiritual transformation, the Sufis have often employed the metaphors of a "path" that is followed by a "journeyer" or a "seeker," in which the journeyer passes through various stages or domains of knowledge of God as he encounters increasingly subtle states of the spirit. For example, Ibn 'Ajiba wrote, "The *ruh,* as long as it is engrossed in ignorance, is called the 'ego-self' (*nafs*) and will never access the divine presence."[8] For Ibn 'Ajiba, the process of self-transformation is an awakening of the *ruh*—in other words, a reorientation of the individual's ego-self until it awakens to its true nature and perceives the phenomenal world, not as a discrete entity separate from God but as a continuum of divine presences, or centers of divine manifestation. Spirituality, within the context of Sufi teachings, is thus a function of the process of transformation or reorientation of the ego-self. For the Sufis, this implied that the degree to which one participates in this process of transformation is the degree to which one participates in Islamic spirituality.

In the following narrative, Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani reproduces a dialogue between two famous early Sufis, Abu al-Hasan al-Farghani and Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 945 CE). This narrative graphically illustrates the Sufi view of spirituality as an ethical journey of self-transformation based on a self-knowledge that results from an intimate knowledge of God:

> I asked Shibli, "What is the sign of one who knows God intimately (*'arif*)?" He said, "His breast is open, his heart bears wounds and his body is discarded [in the dust]." I said, "This is the sign of one who knows God intimately; who then is one who knows of God intimately?" He said, "He is one who knows God and His intent [for creation]; he acts in accordance with that which God commands and turns from that which God has forbidden, and he calls God's servants to God." Then I said, "This is a Knower of God, so who is a Sufi?" He responded, "He is one who has worked to purify his heart and has been purified; he has taken to the path of the Purified One (*al-Mustafa*) [Muhammad] and has cast the world behind him, making passion taste [the bitterness of] denial." So I said, "This is a Sufi, what is Sufism?" He said, "Being in harmony [with others], detachment, and avoidance of excess." I said, "Better than this, what is Sufism?" "It is submitting to the purification of the hearts at the hands of the All-Knowing of the Unseen." I said to him, "And better than this, what is Sufism?" He said, "Exalting God's command and compassion towards God's creatures." Then I said to him, "And better than this, what is a Sufi?" He said, "One who is clear of impurity, free of defilement, occupied with reflection; one for whom gold and clay are equal."[9]

THE SAINT-EXEMPLAR AS A TEACHER OF ETHICS

The key to understanding this process can be found within the basic sources of the Islamic intellectual tradition, the Qur'an and the Sunna.

To understand, however, the manner in which these two sources of Islamic thought relate to Islamic ethics, it is necessary to gain an insight into the examples afforded to us by the spiritual teachers or mentors of the Sufi path. These men and women, based upon Qur'anic terminology, are known as "Friends of God" (*awliya' Allah*). The stories of their lives, their teachings, and sayings have been preserved in the seminal works of Sufism. In his life, the Prophet Muhammad holistically exemplified the Qur'an[10] in such a way that he represented the foremost example of Islam for his community: "Indeed, in the Messenger of God you have the foremost example for the one who hopes for God's blessings, the Final Day and remembers God much" (Qur'an 33:21). The Friends of God represent within their own communities the highest aspirations and ideals of the Qur'anic and Prophetic models. Their role, didactic in nature, has long served to define Islamic spirituality. Herein lies their importance to our comprehension of Islamic ethics. The Friends of God are the embodiment of Islamic ethical teachings. They represent the fruit of such teachings and are a living testimony to the relevance of ethical conduct in daily life. They are mentors and teachers, who, by their example, restore their communities to the path of ethical conduct when people lose touch with the Qur'anic and Prophetic models. This role has earned them the high esteem in which they have been held in the traditional Islamic world. Their very presence in the community is considered a protection and a source of hope in the face of adversity. Their absence from a community is considered a sign that the community is turning away from God and His decrees.

The foundation of Sufi education is in compliance with the Qur'an and the Sunna, the example of the Prophet Muhammad. These two sources have long been considered the foundations of all religious knowledge and the keys to the direct and intimate knowledge of divine reality. In the early Sufi text *Darajat al-Sadiqin* (Stations of the Righteous), Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami affirms the ethical nature of the journey he portrays for the disciple. He assures him that there is no path without the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet: "There can be no successful completion of the journey through the spiritual stations without a propitious beginning. He who has not founded his aspirant's journey upon the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet will attain nothing of the knowledge of God."[11]

Submission to the religious law in Islam implies striving for perfect sincerity in the state of servanthood before God. This happens on two levels. On one level, it means perfecting servanthood outwardly as ethical conduct; on the other level, it means perfecting sincerity inwardly, as a set of ethical attitudes. In practice, this is accomplished by striving to imitate the Messenger of God through the Sunna, while never forgetting that in all spiritual states, the seeker is dependent on God. In a work dealing with the early Sufis of his native city of Nishapur, Sulami writes: "Among their tenets is that the state of servanthood is founded upon two essential things: the perfect

awareness of one's total dependence upon God, and perfect imitation of the Messenger of God. In these the soul finds neither respite nor rest."[12]

Adherence to the Qur'anic and Prophetic models was more than a code of conduct; it provided the journeyer on the Sufi path with a means of conforming to the normative state in which God had originally created humanity, the *fitrat Allah*. From a Sufi perspective, this state mirrors God's intentions in the world. Ethical conduct thus becomes a means of conforming to God's will. Traditionally, the exemplar of ethical conduct within Islamic society was the Friend of God, for as a reflection of God's goal for humanity he or she represented what was most central to the spiritual life of the community. Peter Brown, writing on the role of the saint-exemplar in late antiquity, finds this same centrality within the context of Christianity. He defines the saint-exemplar as a "carrier of Christ," a figure who distilled in concrete and accessible form "central values and expectations." Brown also characterizes the relationship that binds the holy man as exemplar to his disciples as one of "esteem and love."[13] These perceptions of the saint-exemplar ring as true for traditional Islamic society as they do for the Christianity of late antiquity and go far in creating a common ground for understanding the spiritual realities and relationships that have long characterized the faith communities of humanity.

Just as the Qur'an and the Sunna manifest themselves through the saint-exemplar, the Sufi path, characterized by the pedagogic relationship between the mentor and the disciple, is a model of ethical comportment. This model relates directly to the Qur'anic and Prophetic models but goes beyond the prescriptive rules that are often associated with the idea of ethical conduct. The inclusive term for correct comportment in Arabic is *adab*.[14] Perfect *adab* is characterized as an attitude of complete detachment from one's individual inclinations and desires and a total commitment to self-effacement. For the Sufis, *adab* was the second of the two most important principles of spiritual transformation. It afforded the Sufi, so to speak, a "second wing" on his journey toward knowledge of God. In the following quotation by Sulami from *Darajat al-Sadiqin*, the perspective of *adab* as ethical comportment is well expressed:

> The comportment (*adab*) that brought them to this [initial] station [on the path] and this degree consists of their imposing upon themselves various spiritual exercises. Before this, they began with true repentance, perfect detachment, turning from all other than God, from the world and its occupants, the abandonment of all they own, distancing themselves from their personal inclinations, departure upon long journeys, denial of outward passionate desires, constant watchfulness over their inner mysteries, deference towards the masters of the Path, service to brethren and friends, giving preference to others over themselves in worldly goods, person and spirit, perseverance in [their] efforts, and regarding all their actions or states that may arise from them inwardly or outwardly with contempt and disdain.[15]

This passage reveals that as an inner attitude, *adab* is a norm of ethical conduct, although it is not directly derived from the Qur'anic and the Prophetic models. It comprises an inner dimension of ethical conduct that combines individual experience with the normative standards of self-evaluation that are central to the process of spiritual education. Normative ethical standards are a salient feature of Islamic ethics and have been characterized by some scholars as the rationale behind the religious disciplines. According to the Swedish Orientalist Tor Andrae, "The ethics of Islam consists of the observance of religious discipline."[16] Such conduct reflects the highest aspirations and values of Islamic society. Muslims see spiritual transformation as a central goal of their religious life. This attitude is not limited to an educated, urban elite. The Sufi teachings of Islam have had as much influence among the farmers and artisans of the Muslim world as they have had among the scholars.

Cultivating ethics in both its social and spiritual dimensions has far-reaching consequences. Inwardly, it is a means of counteracting the ego-self and its inclination toward pride, vanity, and self-satisfaction. Outwardly, ethical conduct occupies the ego-self with the demands of each moment in time, leaving it little time to indulge in momentary caprices. In the following quotation, Hamdun al-Qassar of Nishapur (d. 884 CE) stresses the all-inclusive nature of ethical comportment (*adab*): "Sufism is made up entirely of ethical comportment (*adab*); for each moment there is a correct comportment, for each spiritual station there is a correct comportment. Whoever is steadfast in maintaining the correct comportment of each moment, will attain spiritual excellence, and whoever neglects correct comportment, is far from that which he imagines near, and is rejected from where he imagines he has found acceptance."[17]

Journeying or traveling on the Sufi path (*suluk*) was thus a commitment to religious discipline in accord with the Qur'an and Sunna and submission to ethical conduct, both outwardly and inwardly. The goal of Sufi teaching was to infuse the ethical and spiritual comportment of the aspirant with an in inner understanding of each moment as God decreed it in the world. Thus the famous Sufi maxim, "The Sufi is the son of the moment." One's outward comportment was reflective of one's interior state. There could be no knowledge of God without ethically correct comportment and one's comportment could not be fully correct without a corresponding knowledge of God.

The saint-exemplar, the mentor, or "Man of God," is a key to the actualization of ethical comportment, as ethical comportment is a key to the actualization of knowledge of God. Finding a saint-exemplar is thus a major goal of the journeyer. The saint-exemplar's role vastly exceeds that of a "good example" or a "patron saint." As examples of ethical comportment, the "men of God" reflect an essential unity with all other saint-exemplars. In their very being, they reflect the inner unity that underlies outward diversity.

As Brown points out for early Christianity, " To be a 'Man of God' was to revive on the banks of the Nile all other 'men of God' in all other ages."[18]

The saint-exemplar is the key to the teachings he transmits; he is a sign of divine mercy for the journeyers on the path. In the following statement, Sulami accents the role of mercy as he describes the saint-exemplar, comparing his role in relation to his disciples with the role of the scholars of the Law in relation to the generality of believers:

> [God] may reveal [the saint-exemplar] to people as an example and a refuge to which spiritual aspirants might turn in their quest of Him. In this, [God] permits the outward aspect [of the servant] to turn toward humanity as a mercy from Him to them. For were the saint's knowledge, character, and spiritual disciplines lost to them [referring to the aspirants], they would stray in their endeavor and their quest and fall into illusion. By the lights of these exemplars, their path is illuminated and by their counsel, they are rightly guided on their path to their goal. [Those among the saints who are returned to live with people] are the mentors of the aspirants to divine reality. They are the masters of hearts and lofty spiritual degrees. They are reference points for the travelers on the path, in them they find a guiding light and refuge. In the same manner, the generality of believers find a refuge in questions of law with the jurists.[19]

The saint-exemplar is the door through which the disciple passes on her way to God. Both while living and after death, these mentors are considered a means of realizing the fruits of the path to the knowledge of God. Thus, the memory of the saint-exemplars has been preserved after their deaths in the works of hagiography written on their lives and in the tombs and sacred precincts that so distinctly mark the landscape of Muslim lands. These tomb complexes continue to be visited today out of reverence for the saint-exemplars of the past and for the blessings that the faithful obtain in the spaces that are sanctified by their presence, where they taught, and where their teachings continue to be passed on from generation to generation. These sacred precincts are centers for spiritual transformation where Sufis meet to remember God, recite the Qur'an, and meditate. They often include hospices, schools, mosques, and soup kitchens for the poor and visitors. Such precincts draw men and women from all occupations. To the pilgrims, these precincts are locales of inner repose and peace, where, through the presence of the saint-exemplar, they experience God's proximity.

ZALAL AL-FUQARA': A TREATISE ON SUFI ETHICS

This section is an overview of a treatise on Sufi ethics by the tenth-century Sufi Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami.[20] This text, a rich source of the teachings of the early saint-exemplars of Sufism, illustrates the centrality of the ethical teachings that Sufis derived from the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the tradition of *adab*. These values continue to resonate within Islamic society

today. The full title of this work in translation is *The Stumbling of Those Who Aspire and the Ethical Comportment of the Folk Who Have Chosen Spiritual Poverty as Their Path.*[21] The shortened title of the work, *Zalal al-fuqara'*, means "The Stumbling of the Poor." *Faqir* (pl. *fuqara'*) is an Arabic term that for the Sufis referred to the practice of spiritual poverty (*faqr*). A *faqir* is a practitioner of spiritual poverty, and the term was often used as a synonym for "Sufi." For Sulami, all of the spiritual virtues admired by Sufis are contained in spiritual poverty. This is because spiritual poverty exemplifies the effacement of the ego-self that is central to the concept of *adab* as spiritual comportment: "This *faqr* or spiritual poverty is nothing other than a *vacare Deo,* an emptiness for God; it begins with the rejection of passions and its crown is the effacement of the 'I' before the Divinity. The nature of this virtue clearly shows the inverse analogy that links the human symbol with its divine archetype: what is emptiness on the side of the creature is plenitude on the side of the Creator." [22]

Zalal al-fuqara' is a work of formative Sufism by a spiritual mentor who emphasizes the ethical nature of spiritual conduct. The text's central theme is spiritual poverty (*faqr*), which from the Islamic perspective is an intrinsic attribute of all created beings and the active principle that underlies all ethical conduct. For Sulami, the prerequisite for the realization of *faqr* as a spiritual discipline was the realization of one's utter effacement before God. From the Sufi perspective, *faqr* is the spiritual attitude that resonates most distinctly with humanity's state of servanthood (*'ubudiyya*) before God. As stated in the Qur'an, the reason behind God's creation of humankind is servanthood: "I only created human beings and the *jinn* in order to serve me" (Qur'an 51:67). Servanthood and *faqr* relate to one another as do the two complimentary poles of *adab,* ethical conduct, on the one hand, and *akhlaq,* the inner awareness of morality and ethics, on the other hand. *Zalal al-fuqara'* is thus a practical guide to the Sufi way that relates human dispositions and inner attitudes to the outward aspects of ethical conduct.

In the Introduction to *Zalal al-fuqara',* Sulami presents the fundamental precepts of spiritual poverty, which are derived from the Qur'anic concept of servanthood, humble submission to God's will. He reasons that utter need (*faqr*) is one of the traits of servanthood: a servant is capable of nothing on his own (Qur'an 16:75). In the state of servanthood, there is neither arrogance nor pride; therefore, anyone who claims a spiritual state or station for oneself is far from realizing true servanthood. In the remainder of the Introduction, Sulami discusses the norms of spiritual poverty and the accompanying ethical attitudes that are foundational to this mode of Sufi practice. These norms are founded upon an inward attitude of self-effacement and an outward commitment to serving others. The essence of spiritual poverty is to empty the innermost recesses of the soul of the world and all that is in it, while always being in a state of utter need for God. Sulami calls this state "praiseworthy *faqr*." From the practice's point of view, the disciple does

not abandon his daily profession, nor does he don a patched frock (*muraqqa'a*), nor does he flaunt his poverty. Such an outward show of poverty reduces *faqr* to mere destitution, a state that is not fitting for those who have found sufficiency in God. Rather, the true *faqir* passes unnoticed among people: only those who are aware of his state know him (Qur'an 2:273). The true *faqir* makes his state of need known only to God. Humility thus becomes an ethical precept that prevents the disciple from being judgmental of others, for he regards all others as superior to himself. From this perspective, anyone that finds satisfaction in one's own spiritual state or pious act is only displaying gross ignorance.

Sulami then contrasts the true *faqir* to the pretender to poverty, the deluded aspirant who forsakes the world and turns from it but condemns those who follow worldly pursuits and regards other human beings with scorn. Having thus elucidated the two poles of conduct in the practice of poverty, Sulami then concludes his Introduction by affirming that true *faqr* is to be attained only through inner detachment from the world and outer commitment to the Shari'a. Its incumbent attitudes are: reposing in God's knowledge of one's state, sobriety, humility, relinquishing one's claims over others, abandonment of one's natural inclinations, belittlement of oneself while honoring others, nobility of character, detachment from worldly sustenance, and reliance upon God, the One Who Suffices:

> One attains to the reality of *faqr* only after he enters therein by its principles and resides therein by its required comportment. Its precept of entry is to cast off all attachments [to outward things] from the innermost soul while putting formal religious knowledge into practice. The precepts of correct conduct [in *faqr*] are repose [in the knowledge that God knows our every state], sobriety, humility, preference of others over ourselves, relinquishing the self's claims, abandonment of natural inclinations, being disdainful of the self while honoring people, nobility of character, detachment from sustenance, and trust in the One Who Suffices, which is sincere reliance on His guarantee.[23]

In the body of *Zalal al-fuqara'*, Sulami discusses in detail the ethical principles, attitudes, and corresponding modes of conduct that he dealt with in general terms in the Introduction.[24] This treatise is a product of the process of dialogue that went on between the textual sources of Islam and the applied guidance of the saint-exemplars of Sufism. The nature of its discourse is interpretive, in that it contextualizes within a practical methodology of inner and outer comportment the ethical ideals that are expressed in the Qur'an and Hadith. Given the wealth of interpretive possibilities afforded by these texts, it is not surprising to find in such works a preponderance of Sufi sayings in comparison with the citations of the Qur'an and Hadith. Sulami cites more than 60 narratives about the saint-exemplars of Sufism, but only 10 Qur'anic verses and four Hadith texts. However, this apparent imbalance does not reflect a lack of concern by Sulami for the centrality of the Qur'an and the Sunna as sources of Islamic tradition.

The necessity of close compliance with the Qur'an and the Sunna is a theme that Sulami returns to repeatedly in his explication of the precepts of spiritual poverty. He writes, "The best [comportment] of a *faqir* is [his] ethical interaction with others, following the example of the Messenger of God in the Shari'a and actualizing intimate knowledge of God with regard to the Absolute Truth (*al-Haqq*)."[25] The following statement by Yahya ibn Mu'adh al-Razi (d. 864–865 CE), which is reproduced in Sulami's treatise, is representative of the way in which early Sufis based their ethical and devotional methods on practices outlined in the Prophetic Sunna. When asked at what point a *faqir* may claim to be truly on the path of Sufism, he replied:

> Not until he has prevailed over his ego-self in the following ways. He completely abandons the world, even while holding those who seek it in respect. At all times he is occupied with mandatory acts of devotion, devotional acts in the Sunna, or supererogatory acts. He is too preoccupied with his devotions to be concerned with whether he is accepted or rejected by others. He accumulates nothing. There is neither deceit in his heart nor malice toward any person and his devotions are not sullied by people's awareness of him. People's praise does not influence him and he would not slacken [in his devotions] were they to shun him.[26]

A salient aspect of *Zalal al-fuqara'* is the manner in which Sulami contextualizes the ethical ideals expressed in Islamic scripture within a framework of practical guidance that emphasizes the value of ethical practice. He cites Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri (d. 910 CE) as saying, "Ethical conduct is the mainstay of the poor in God (*faqir*) and the dignity of the wealthy in God (*ghani*)."[27] One of the results of ethical conduct is compassion and empathy for others who share the same trials and tribulations in life. According to the Sufi Abu 'Abdallah al-Jala' (d. 918 CE), "When a servant has realized the state of true *faqr*, he dons the raiment of contentment [in God], and in so doing increases his compassion for others, such that he conceals their faults, prays for them, and shows them mercy."[28]

For Sulami, the most essential inner attitude upon which ethical conduct is founded is disdain for the ego-self (*nafs*). Disdain for the ego-self and its abasement is a theme that has long been counted among the distinctive teachings of Sufism. This principle is well represented in *Zalal al-fuqara'*. Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri is reported as saying, "Everything that pleases the ego-self, be it obedience or disobedience, is passion (*shahwa*)."[29] Abu Ya'qub al-Nahrajuri (d. 941–942 CE) said: "Among the signs of the one whose state God has taken in hand is that he attests to the inadequacy of his sincerity, the heedlessness of his invocation, the imperfection of his truthfulness, the laxness of his discipline, and his lack of observance of what is required of spiritual poverty. Thus, all of his states are insufficient to him, both in his aspiration and in his [spiritual] journeying. He always feels his need for God until he is extinguished from all else but Him. For such a one, men's fortunes, as well as praise and blame have fallen away."[30]

The second distinctive trait of Sufi ethical practice for Sulami was the rejection of all pretensions to piety or advanced spiritual states. Disclaiming one's prerogative to special treatment is the foundation stone of service. Discussing this principle, Sulami writes: "It is obligatory for a sincere *faqir* to use the outward aspect of each of his moments to assist others, while not seeking assistance from them."[31] The disclaiming of all individual pretension is also an important step in the process of orienting oneself toward God. Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri said, "Fear of God will bring you to God, pride and self-satisfaction will sever you from God, and scorn for other people will afflict you with a disease for which there is no cure."[32] Among the fruits of avoiding spiritual pretentiousness was freedom from judging the states and acts of others. Addressing this issue, Hiri's disciple Mahfuz ibn Mahmud (d. 916 CE) said: "Whoever gives undue regard to the virtues of his own soul will be afflicted by the vices of people, but whoever looks to the faults of his soul will be freed from mentioning the vices of people."[33] Perhaps the most outstanding result of the Sufi disdain for pretentiousness was the flexibility it offered to traditional Islamic legal discourse. The following statement by Ruwaym (d. 915 CE), a revered Sufi of Baghdad, gives eloquent expression to this aspect of Sufi ethics: "Part of the wisdom of the *faqir* is in allowing a broad interpretation of the Law where his brothers are concerned, while enjoining strictness upon himself. This is because granting latitude to them is in accordance with religious teachings, while calling oneself to account assiduously is among the precepts of ethical accountability."[34]

If humility and self-effacement are inward consequences of disdain for the ego-self, an outward consequence would be a life of anonymity among the crowd, of hiding the true nature of one's inner states. For Sulami, this practice is another element in the process of spiritual transformation. He considered hiding one's inner states as a key to sincerity, which is a central principle of ethical conduct. In the following statement, he expresses the consequences of ostentation and through inverse reasoning demonstrates the necessity of anonymity in the realization of sincerity:

> Were a *faqir* to forsake an outward means of livelihood, he would surely be driven to importunity in seeking aid.[35] Were he to don the patched frock or show outward signs of spiritual poverty, he would likewise be showing importunity. Were he to make a show of his spiritual poverty before the wealthy, he would only show [his] esteem for the world and its place in his heart; for were there no esteem in his heart for the world, he would not flaunt his renunciation of it before others. Of such a one it has been said, "Verily, for one who esteems the world, God has no esteem."[36]

Among the consequences of hiding one's inner states is that an individual who attains true sincerity will have his awareness of a meritorious deed or state erased from his memory. He will thus be free of any compulsion to remember it. In the following quotation, Sulami narrates that his grandfather, the Sufi Isma'il ibn Nujayd (d. 976–977 CE), said: "The proof that

one of your actions has not been accepted [by God] is that you come to take account of it. For that which is accepted is elevated and vanishes from sight. Not being aware of it is the sign of its having been accepted.''[37] Even more indicative of the essential relationship between anonymity and the realization of true sincerity is the following statement by Ibn al-Jala', one of the most renowned mentors of the Sufi path in Iraq and Syria. When he was asked, ''When is the *faqir* worthy of the name *faqir*?'' He answered, ''When there is no spiritual poverty left in him.'' Then he was asked, ''How can this be?'' To which he replied, ''Were poverty his, it would not be 'his,' but were [poverty] not his, it would be 'his.''' [38]

Sulami concludes his discourse on spiritual poverty with a statement by Abu 'Ali al-Juzjani, one of the most illustrious Sufi teachers of Khurasan, the region that now comprises eastern Iran and Central Asia. Juzjani summarizes the distinguishing traits of the practitioners of spiritual poverty in a way that beautifully summarizes the balance between inner attitudes and outer behaviors that characterizes the Sufi approach to ethics:

> Obedience to God is their sweetness. Love of God is their companion. God is their need and He is their protector. Righteousness is their nature. With God is their commerce. Upon Him they depend. With Him is their intimacy, and in Him is their confidence. Hunger is their nourishment, nakedness their dress, renunciation their gain, ethical comportment their discerning trait, humility their disposition, and an open smiling face their adornment. Generosity is their profession, intimate fellowship is their companionship, the intellect is their leader, patience is their driving force, and abstinence is their provision. The Qur'an is their speech, gratitude is their ornament, the invocation of God is their yearning, contentment [with God] is their repose, and sufficiency is their treasure. Worship is their profession, Satan is their enemy, the world is their refuse heap, modesty is their garment, and fear is their natural temperament. The night is their meditation, the day is their reflection, wisdom is their sword, and the Truth is their guardian. Life is their path, death is their home, the grave is their citadel, and the Day of Judgment is their feast. [To stand] before God is their most ardent desire. In the shade of The Throne is their gathering-place. *Firdaws*[39] is their dwelling and the vision of God is the object of their yearning.[40]

The main body of *Zalal al-fuqara'* sustains the complementarity of interior attitudes and ethical conduct that Sulami outlined in his Introduction. The aspirant on the path to ethical excellence is self-effaced in his attitudes and conduct; he makes no claims to spiritual authority, nor does he seek personal satisfaction from his states or deeds of piety. In contrast, a pretentious man vies for worldly renown owing to his own inflated view of his piety. He thus falls from the path of seekers of sincerity and enters the path of the indigent and the destitute. This section of the text is rich in the teachings of Khurasan, Sulami's home region. Throughout this work Sulami

opens a window onto a spiritual tradition that is as fresh today as it was in his own time, over 900 years ago.

The final sections of *Zalal al-fuqara'* comprise one of the most concise and eloquently written expositions of Sufi ethics that has been preserved in the rich heritage of Sufi literature. This section of the treatise is conspicuously lacking in citations of any kind. Here we encounter Sulami, the teacher and mentor, who has a unique ability to situate the subject of his discourse within a synthetic vision of the Sufi path. The passages of this section are derived from an earlier work by Sulami, *Suluk al-ʿarifin* (The Wayfaring of the Gnostics). In this work, Sulami depicts the various stages of the process of spiritual transformation from the point of view of the aspirant as he journeys toward his goal, the intimate knowledge of the Absolute (*al-Haqq*). As in *Zalal al-fuqara',* spiritual poverty is essential to the process of finding God. In the final section of *Zalal al-fuqara',* Sulami reiterates that the actualization of true spiritual poverty is extremely difficult to attain, for it is the spiritual state of the Prophet Muhammad himself. However, citing the Qur'an and the Hadith, he assures his reader that one who sincerely commits oneself to the process of spiritual transformation, and who sincerely orients oneself according to the compass of ethical conduct, will eventually attain the desired goal. "Anyone who patterns his life in the manner we have described and searches his soul for sincerity will be granted the blessing of truly realizing this way. The Most High has said: 'As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them to Our Paths' (Qur'an 29:69). The Prophet—may the peace and blessings of God be upon him—said, "He who acts upon what he knows, God will endow him with what he does not know."

In his introduction to *Saints and Virtues,* John Stratton Hawley wrote, "Within each religion a powerful body of tradition emphasizes not codes but stories, not precepts but personalities, not lectures but lives."[41] In Islam, Sufism comprises such a body of tradition. The earliest traditions of Sufism define its method as a way of ethical conduct, *akhlaq*. The writings of Sufis in the formative period of the tradition clearly articulate that ethical conduct was practiced within the contexts of individual reorientation toward and a process of spiritual transformation. Transformation and change are inherent to the human state. The mentors and saint-exemplars of Sufism, as interpreters of the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, have since the earliest times provided their communities with guidance of how to achieve spiritual transformation. Ethical conduct, as exemplified in the figure of the saint-exemplar, has played a major role in defining the ideals and values of Islamic society from the earliest days of the community. A central tenet of Islamic spirituality is the process of individual transformation and reorientation of the ego-self that accords with the foundational sources of the tradition. The degree to which a person is a participant in this process depends on the degree to which he or she can participate in the ethical formation that was the mainstay of this process. Sufism, through its saint-exemplars,

provided Islamic society with the axis around which the process of ethical development could be actualized on both the individual and the social level.

NOTES

1. For a good collection of early sayings defining Sufism, see T. Frank, "'Tasawwuf is…' On a Type of Mystical Aphorism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.1 (1984).

2. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya,* ed. Nur al-Din Shurayba (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1969), 167.

3. Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya,* eds. Ma'ruf Zurayq and 'Ali 'Abd al-Majid Baltaji (Beirut: Dar al-Khayr, 1993), 271.

4. Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi, *Al-Luma',* ed. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Taha 'Abd al-Baqi Surur (Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1960), 45.

5. Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-awliya' wa tabaqat al-asfiya'* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 55.

6. For more on the life of Ibn 'Ajiba see Ahmed Ibn 'Ajiba, *The Autobiography* (Fahrasa) *of a Moroccan Sufi: Ahmad Ibn 'Ajiba,* translated from the Arabic by Jean-Louis Michon, translated from the French by David Streight (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999).

7. Ahmad Ibn 'Ajiba, *Mi'raj al-tashawwuf ila haqa'iq al-tasawwuf,* in *Kitab sharh salat al-Qutb Ibn Mashish,* ed. 'Abd al-Salam al-'Imrani (Casablanca: Dar al-Rashad al-Haditha, 1999), 69.

8. Ibn 'Ajiba, *Sharh salat Ibn Mashish,* 29–30.

9. Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-awliya',* 55; this quotation is also cited by T. Frank, "*Tasawwuf* Is…" 76, translation by the present author.

10. When the Prophet's wife 'A'isha was asked about the ethical conduct of the Prophet, she responded: "The ethical conduct of the Messenger of God was the Qur'an." *Sahih Muslim* (746), "The Chapter of the Traveler's Prayer," sub-section: "Joining the Night Prayer."

11. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Darajat al-sadiqin* in *Three Early Sufi Texts: Stations of the Righteous,* trans. Kenneth Honerkamp (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2003), 127.

12. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami, *Risalat al-Malamatiyya,* ed. Abu al-'Ala 'Afifi (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1945), 111.

13. Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," in *Saints and Virtues,* ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1987), 9.

14. *Adab* is a term that has been used with a wide range of meanings, including correct beliefs, rules of conduct, and customs. For a survey of these meanings, see F. Garbrieli, "Adab," *EI 2,* vol. 1, 175–176. Treatises dealing with the *adab* of the Sufis have existed from the earliest eras of Islamic literature. For a detailed account of Sufi *adab* literature, see Etan Kohlberg's edition of Sulami's *Jawami' adab al-sufiyya,* (Jerusalem, 1976) 10–13. One of the best known Prophetic traditions on

the subject of *adab* was transmitted by Sulami in this work: ''According to Shaqiq (al-Balkhi), according to 'Abdallah (ibn Mas'ud), the Messenger of God said: ''God had instilled *adab* within me and has perfected it within me, for He commanded me to observe noble conduct, saying: ''Be clement. Command the good and turn away from the ignorant'' (Qur'an 7:199), 3. Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) the Andalusian mystic and renowned teacher whose writings have greatly influenced Sufism, distinguishes four types of *adab: Adab* of the Law (*adab al-Shari'a*), *Adab* of Service (*adab al-khidma*), *Adab* of Right, (*adab al-haqq*), and *Adab* of Essential Reality (*adab al-haqiqa*). See Denis Gril, ''*Adab* and Revelation, One of the Foundations of the Hermeneutics of Ibn 'Arabi,'' in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi: A Commemorative Volume,* ed. Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tieran (Shaftesbury, Dorset and Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1993), 228–263.

15. Sulami, *Darajat al-sadiqin* in *Three Early Sufi Texts,* 120.

16. Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism,* trans. Birgitta Sharpe (Albany, New York: State University New York Press, 1987), 36.

17. Sulami, *Tabaqat al-sufiyya,* 119.

18. Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar," 11.

19. Sulami, *Darajat al-sadiqin* in *Three Early Sufi Texts,* 126–127.

20. On the life and works of Sulami, see Nur al-Din Shurayba's Introduction to *Tabaqat al-Sufiyya,* 11–47; Gerhard Böwering, ''The *Qur'an* Commentary of al-Sulami,'' in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams,* eds. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little, (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1991), 41–56; Rkia Cornell's Introduction to Abu 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Sulami, *Early Sufi Women:* Dhikr an-niswa al-muta'abbidat as-sufiyyat (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999), 31–43; J. Thibon, ''Hiérarchie spirituelle, fonctions du saint et hagiographie dans l'oeuvre de Sulamî,'' *in Le Saint et son Milieu,* eds. R. Chih and Denis Gril, Cahier des Annales Islamologiques (Cairo : Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2000), 13–31.

21. For a complete translation of this work, see Sulami, *Darajat al-sadiqin* in *Three Early Sufi Texts,* 126–127.

22. Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Mohammad Ashraf, 1991 reprint), 110.

23. Sulami, *Zalal al-fuqara'* in *Three Early Sufi Texts,* 132.

24. Ibid., 132–149.

25. Ibid., 143.

26. Ibid., 138.

27. Ibid., 144.

28. Ibid., 135.

29. Ibid., 132.

30. Ibid., 141.

31. Ibid., 140.

32. Ibid., 144.

33. Ibid., 145.

34. Ibid., 144.

35. The Arabic root of the verb used in this passage (*lahafa*) means, ''to request or demand urgently,'' to solicit in such a manner that one makes a display of one's

state of need. For the Sufis, to manifest a state of need to other than for God was seen as unseemly.

36. Sulami, *Zalal al-fuqara'* in *Three Early Sufi Texts,* 130.

37. Ibid., 136.

38. Ibid., 134.

39. *Firdaws* is a synonym for Paradise. It is referred to twice in the Qur'an (18:107 and 23:11). See Duncan B. Macdonald, "Firdaws," in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam,* eds. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramer (1953 repr., Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 108.

40. Sulami, *Zalal al-fuqara'* in *Three Early Sufi Texts,* 147.

41. John Stratton Hawley, Introduction to *Saints and Virtues,* ed. John Stratton Hawley (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1987), xi.

15

Islam and Business

Abdulkader Thomas

> Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly, be aware that lawful gain should be only through business based on mutual consent among you, and do not destroy one another.
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> (Qur'an 4:29)

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was a merchant. As a young man, he earned the nickname *al-Amin,* "The Trustworthy," for his conduct when entrusted with the business of others. On the one hand, this prophetic legacy meant that Muslims have always found honor in trade. On the other hand, Islam has established a well-developed juristic tradition governing commerce. This tradition is bounded by a concern for the believer's eternal soul. The moment trade engages in what is forbidden or opens a door that may lead to such a direction, more than just profits and losses are concerned. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "The lawful is self-evident and the unlawful is self-evident. However, between the two are matters that may give rise to confusion, because they are not well understood by many people. He who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and his honor blameless, but he who indulges in doubtful things actually indulges in unlawful things."[1]

Because of such concerns, Islam imposes on Muslims rules and regulations relating to such matters as how to draw up a contract, what actions render a contract invalid, and the obligation to think of the greater social welfare in one's business dealings. Although Islam first emerged in the Arabian Peninsula, Muslims rapidly found themselves trading widely beyond their frontiers and engaging in commerce in three continents. Each new market brought with it new customs, new ideas, and new tests for the application of Islamic concepts. Until today, these challenges have required fresh investigations into the nature of Qur'anic dictates and the teachings embodied in the Prophetic Sunna. The research required to explore new Islamic responses

to modern business practices is not conducted in a vacuum. In the words of the Sudanese scholar Mohammad Adam El-Sheikh, ‘‘New research should seek to meet the needs of contemporary life in light of the critical evaluation of modern experience.’’[2] For instance, the Shari‘a as it is traditionally understood does not accommodate the corporation, which is conceived legally as a fictitious person, with rights and duties similar to that of a natural person.[3] However, all Western law codes do so. This and a variety of other legal and organizational matters pertinent to changes in global commerce require high-quality research into authentic Islamic resources in order to identify permissible commercial outcomes for the devout Muslim with respect to relevant transactions and structures. In this chapter, we examine the evolving consensus of modern Islamic scholars on the core methods of commerce within the underlying legal framework of the Shari‘a. We will also look into the challenges that Muslims face in applying and understanding the Shari‘a in commerce.

THE PURPOSES OF THE SHARI‘A (*MAQASID AL-SHARI‘A*)

Commerce is a way to improve our lives in the most basic of manners. The exchange of our surpluses, whether in money, commodities, or skills, in a mutually satisfying way allows both parties to feel that commerce has made their lives more complete. A Muslim, however, remembers that true compliance with the Shari‘a means that the satisfaction of one’s desires in this life may only be achieved by keeping in mind one’s eternal life. Hence, the Muslim generally seeks to understand how to be guided by the Shari‘a and accepts this guidance in the context of the Shari‘a’s purposes: ‘‘The aim of Shari‘ah is to make people happier in this world and the Hereafter.’’[4]

For this reason, the Shari‘a embodies a concept called *taysir,* which means, ‘‘making things easier.’’ *Taysir* relates closely to the concept of the removal of hardship (*raf’ al-haraj*). Such important objectives of the Shari‘a are meant to assure that faith is not made distasteful by excessive or unnecessary rules and regulations in the believer’s life. When it comes to commerce, these twin concepts have an inherent complementarity. Business allows for the removal of many hardships from our lives. One merely needs to examine a modern kitchen in a developed country to understand how commerce has delivered greater ease to a homemaker than could ever have been imagined by the homemaker’s great-grandparents. Even in the poorest countries, commerce and the innovation stimulated by commerce have delivered modest efficiencies in the preparation of meals. Such improvements in the lives of homemakers allow them more time to devote to the care of their children, religion, or work. Is this not what is meant by making things easier or removing hardships?

The Hadith compiler Tirmidhi reported that God told the Prophet Muhammad, "You have been sent in order to make things easy, not to make them difficult."[5] An important anecdote tells of the opposition to television in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the face of ultraconservative opposition, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia pointed out two great benefits of the new invention. On the one hand, it could be used to transmit religious knowledge. On the other hand, television could be a tool to advise people of impending danger or important news. The concepts of "making things easy" and "removing hardship" are cornerstones of the concept of public interest (*maslaha*) in Islamic law. Thus, a pious Muslim businessman is necessarily bound by a sense of what the public good is in this life and how one's actions have consequences that affect others in their daily lives and may even affect one's own prospects for the afterlife.

Islam denies its adherents the opportunity to secularize personal behavior. One cannot manage a liquor store from Saturday through Thursday and devote Friday to prayer and charity. The believer is obliged to seek knowledge of what is permissible and not permissible in Islam and to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the Shari'a rules that govern business life. Most important, the Muslim should know that it is wrong to sell or facilitate the sale of what is forbidden in Islam, such as liquor, or to obscure the essence or important elements of a transaction.

A Muslim must have a rudimentary understanding of the theological and philosophical underpinnings of the Shari'a, as these govern one's eternal life. The first principle of Islamic theology is *tawhid*, acceptance of the oneness of God. This is the most stringent approach to monotheism and constitutes the fundamental message of the Qur'an. Adherence to "Tawhidic" theology means that the Muslim accepts the rules established by God and His Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him. These rules seek to define the Tawhidic lifestyle and protect the most important values relating to this life, namely, human life, human intellect, property, honor, and conscience.[6] The safeguarding, in order of priority, of these five values allows each human being to live a quality of life in which she is free to exercise her conscience and worship God in the most uninhibited and loving manner. The protection of these five values leads to two clear principles that are repetitive themes in the conscience of the Muslim businessperson. First, within the specific framework of the Shari'a, the individual has substantial freedom of choice in almost every aspect of life, including commerce. Second, personal property may be freely held, sold, or traded.[7] These principles help give clarity to the notion of the goals or objectives (*maqasid*) of the Shari'a.

An understanding of the objectives of the Shari'a leads one to understand why Islamic law gives considerable leeway for the exercise of discretion or permissibility (*ibaha*). This is a defining principle of the law of interpersonal relations (*mu'amalat*) and commerce in Islamic jurisprudence. The Muslim businessperson is obliged to pay attention to the details of a contract.

However, she can find comfort in the opinion of the classical Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE) about the permissibility of contracts. For Ibn Taymiyya, nothing was forbidden unless God and His Messenger had decreed it to be so. This principle allows considerable latitude in drawing up new types of contracts that reflect changing economic conditions: "God Most High has never prohibited a contract in which there is a benefit for the Muslims and does not inflict any harm upon them."[8] Modern juridical scholars such as Mohammad Hashim Kamali have taken this statement by Ibn Taymiyya to mean that there is no need to seek affirmative evidence in the scriptural sources to declare a transaction valid, so long as one has taken care to observe the basic rules of what one may buy and sell, and the general terms of contracts.[9]

SPECIAL OBLIGATIONS OF STEWARDSHIP

The freedom that Islam gives to the practice of commerce and the drawing up of contracts is bounded by the Qur'anic notion of the human being as *khalifa,* God's warden or trustee of the created world. According to this notion, businesspeople have a broader obligation than just the profit motive. Like other morally conscious human beings, the businessperson must consider the impact of his actions on all aspects of creation. Not only must the objectives of the Shari'a be protected, but the stewardship with which God has charged us also enjoins us to prevent waste (*israf*).[10] When the believer's obligation of stewardship is combined with the obligation to prevent waste, one finds that a Muslim businessperson is obliged to share the concerns underpinning many modern, secular movements of planetary reform, such as those to protect the environment, to defend wildlife, and to understand the ethical implications of genetic modifications. Such global thinking may be nontraditional, but it is fully in accordance with the message of the Qur'an.

God's infinite wisdom leads us to practice mercy, for human beings find it difficult to avoid exaggeration when selling, negotiating profits to an unnecessary degree, and taking shortcuts with their responsibilities when engaged in industry and commerce. This human inclination to overdo things in a way that may cause noncriminal harm is checked to a certain extent by the Qur'anic prescription of *Zakat,* the "purifying" tax on wealth that must be paid by every Muslim. These purifying dues are a balancing feature that reminds the Muslim of his role as custodian or steward of God's creation. Since wealth and the ownership of property are bestowed on us only temporarily, we are obliged to manage such benefits in a way that is beneficial to all, without causing harm.[11] The petty harms that businesspeople and others find so difficult to avoid require a direct and simple form of purification. *Zakat* "purifies" the giver by providing a social outlet for the wealth that one accumulates. This tax is paid only by those with a minimum level of wealth and is assessed in most cases as a 2.5 percent tax on such wealth.

The Zakat tax must be paid every year, even if it means selling assets to free cash for the payment of Zakat. However, this wealth tax is not meant to burden those in severe financial difficulty and who may be unable to afford a home or cannot sustain themselves and their families. The practice of Zakat has a number of complicated rules for those who are actively engaged in commerce or agriculture. These rules are the subject of substantial treatises and allow for business and agricultural managers to make specific decisions that may increase or decrease the amount of Zakat that is due. For instance, the Zakat on a herd of animals is different from that on a crop, which must be stored for significant periods. Also, the Zakat on inventory held for sale is different from that on equipment that is leased or supplies used in the ordinary course of business operations.

A rather intriguing phenomenon is the behavior of individuals residing in countries where Zakat is formally collected by the state. These persons may seek to reduce as much as possible the amount to be collected by the state for diverse reasons. They may fear that the state will not spend Zakat funds in a Qur'anically mandated manner. Or, they may prefer to direct their Zakat payments to a charity chosen by them. As with tax management strategies in a nonreligious environment, there is no Islamic restriction on structuring one's business to minimize one's taxes within the law. However, the same Muslim businesspeople who try to reduce their Zakat payments are often substantial donors to charities. The reduction of the Zakat obligation does not reduce their desire to help others in need. Therefore, they may engage in additional, nonmandatory acts of charity (*Sadaqa*). This term is derived from an Arabic root word meaning "truthful" or "righteous." The Qur'an encourages *Sadaqa,* whether given openly or secretly, as an important, self-imposed obligation for those who have succeeded in commerce.

Sadly, one of the results of the horrific attacks of September 11 has been the so-called War on Terror in which charitable contributions made by Muslims are called into question by various Western governments. The abuse of some charities by supporters of terrorism has tainted one of the most profound religious obligations in Islam. Two trends have evolved in response to these allegations, one of which is not to anyone's benefit. Many donors now feel it necessary to give their charity secretly and in cash, making it more easy for criminals to abuse the Zakat and *Sadaqa* obligations. A second response has developed whereby major Muslim businesspeople, Islamic charities, and governments have partnered to assure that transparent and auditable donations are made legitimately to lawful charities serving the needy. This latter approach is increasingly recognized by Muslim businesspeople as the only way to both fulfill their obligations to help the needy and assure that the architects of the War on Terror do not find a way to make it into a War on Islam.

ETHICAL INVESTMENT IN ISLAM AND THE WEST

Many of the limitations on investment that Muslim businesspeople embrace are similar to approaches that are becoming common in many Western markets and in some developing economies. These are the ethical business, finance, and investing movements, which are gaining popularity around the world. As a result, it should not be surprising that Islamic and Western ethical approaches to investment have strong parallels. The Shari'a sets specific standards for commercial interaction and the avoidance of sinful behavior. Whether or not Muslims have fully lived up to Qur'anic standards, the ethical component of business life is seen as increasingly important. Rodney Wilson, a leading analyst of global investment trends, has compared the charters of Islamic banks and ethically focused conventional banks and has found a convergence between the two.[12] However, there are differences between the Islamic and ethical business movements. For example, the concern not to overinnovate when applying Islamic law and the focus on correct contractual form have kept Muslims from understanding the spirit of ethical finance. Many Muslims are concerned about the methods of transacting such investments, the sources of their funds, and the quality of juristic opinions about these matters. Beyond Zakat and voluntary charity, the medieval Islamic concept of the charitable foundation or endowment (*waqf*) has yet to be adapted to modern conditions in the Islamic finance movement. Although Jordan and Bangladesh have explored innovative means to fund and expand such endowments, this subsegment of financial activity remains underdeveloped in modern Muslim societies.

One of the great achievements to take place in ethical investing in a Muslim country is the refinement of micro-finance by the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. This has been a curious development because Grameen's value orientation is more in line with classical capitalism, although it has been adapted to local social values. In recent years, a more authentically Islamic alternative was developed by Islami Bank Bangladesh and is now widely emulated by many Muslim institutions in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The differences between the Grameen Bank and Islami Bank models reflect the desire of Muslims to operate in an interest-free environment and to offer services in a manner that is in accord with more traditional Islamic family values, such as empowering the male head of a household to exercise his financial responsibilities as implied in the Qur'an. This approach imposes upon the male head of household the obligation to provide for younger family members, mothers, sisters, and others who are deemed to require care and protection. In the Shari'a, this seemingly paternalistic approach grants the so-called weaker members of a household a legal claim on the ''stronger'' member. However, even under Islamic law, women who are financially

independent or who have resources sufficient for investment are allowed to invest their resources as they wish.

SOURCES OF COMMERCIAL LAW IN ISLAM

The nature of rights and obligations in the Qur'an and the Shari'a is based upon the capacity of different parties to fulfill their obligations or properly claim their rights. In many cases, the Shari'a must take into account different circumstances and conditions. Commerce finds three spheres of application of the Shari'a: (1) ethical and moral guidance for the businessperson, (2) resolution of disputes, (3) rules and regulations that govern money. Qur'anic verses that make precise injunctions and offer specific guidance are called *ayat al-ahkam,* "verses of legal rulings." With regard to commerce, three fundamental injunctions are established by the *ayat al-ahkam:* (1) the prohibition of *riba,* (2) the prohibition of inappropriate consumption of wealth, and (3) the requirement of written contracts.[13]

Since much Qur'anic legislation on commerce is of a general nature, Muslims also turn to the authentic sayings and reports of the Prophet Muhammad. Collectively, these traditions are termed the Sunna. The source for this term is a hadith of the Prophet that says, "Follow my Sunna...and that of the rightly guided caliphs who will succeed me. Hold onto it firmly and guard yourself against innovation, for every innovation is mischief."[14] The early Muslims qualified the reliability of the Hadith through a process of critical inquiry:

> Since the *hadith* was passed verbally from one generation to another, the science of *rijal* was developed for the critical examination of the life-histories and the trustworthiness of the hadith transmitters. The narrator of a hadith, for instance, ought to state his source. If the source was not an original companion of the Prophet, the narrator had to state the secondary source from which he received the hadith. Each hadith, therefore, had to be prefixed by a chain of narrators of authorities, *sanad,* that went back to the original narrator. This process was called *isnad* (unbroken chain of transmission).
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> The method of criticism which the scholars of hadith followed helped them in discovering the degree of accuracy of a particular transmitter of a particular hadith. Jurisprudentially speaking, there are many restrictions for considering a hadith suitable to furnish the ground for a legal precept. Jurists categorized Sunna into two major categories: *maqbul* (accepted) and *mardud* (rejected). The accepted Sunna is divided into two groups: *sahih* (authentic) and *hasan* (agreeable). The vast majority of jurists regard the first category as the only valid part of the *Sunna* for serving legitimate grounds for law.[15]

Although some scholars believe that the Hadith are subject to controversy, the rigor of Hadith analysis has meant that the core body of the Sunna has been free from controversy since the ninth century of the Common Era. Although matters of worship are highly detailed within the Sunna, matters

of commerce are less detailed. Of less weight than the Hadith are the *athar*, the sayings of the Companions and immediate generations following the Prophet, may peace be upon him. Accepted *athar* are seen as supplementary traditions that illuminate the Hadith and provide evidence of practices that were observed or tolerated during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime.

According to Dr. El-Sheikh, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is the exercise of intelligence to solve practical problems in the absence of a specific command from the Qur'an or the Sunna. The practice of *fiqh* requires intelligence and independent judgment.[16] Whereas the Qur'an and the Sunna are the primary sources of law, Islamic tradition embraces other forms of legislation and practical guidance as well. However, this exercise of human discretion is limited. According to the noted Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Divine law is an objective transcendent reality, by which man and his actions are judged, not vice versa.... To attempt to shape the Divine law to the 'times' is, therefore, no less than spiritual suicide because it removes the very criteria by which the real value of human life and action can be objectively judged and thus surrenders man to the most infernal impulses of his lower nature."[17]

However, in practical terms, says Dr. Fathi Osman, "Legal rules in the Qur'an and Sunna are limited in number, although they cover extensive areas of life. Many of these rules offer general principles and guidelines. Justice is ordained for essentially all human activities: in family, in business, in the whole society, between rulers and the ruled, and in all universal relations in general. In the field of transactions, for example, the Qur'an and Sunna emphasize the essential requirements for mutual consent for any contract and the prohibition of exploitation, fraud and usury."[18]

Most historians of Islamic law state that *ijma'*, the consensus of the jurists, is the third source of legislation in Islam. In reality, however, the proper term is *ijtihad*, literally, the "struggle" to apply the law in specific cases. One may consider *ijtihad* to be the third source of legislation because it is the result of either individual scholarly effort or collective scholarly and juristic analysis.[19] This latter, collective form of *ijtihad* is *ijma'*. The areas in which *ijtihad* operates include analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), juridical preference (*istihsan*), public welfare (*istislah*), and custom (*'urf*).[20] The purpose of *ijtihad* is to make life easier within the bounds of the permissible (the concept of *taysir* discussed above), to protect the public interest, to eliminate hardship (the concept of *raf' al-haraj* discussed above), and to address the issue of necessity in the context of meeting the objectives of the Shari'a.[21]

Certain forms of contract are not in general agreement with the accepted principles of contract in the Shari'a. However, it is through juristic preference, giving way over time to consensus, that such contracts are permitted.[22] For instance, some Muslim jurists worry about the lack of commercial trust among obligors and allow the assessment and collection of penalty interest so long as it is given to charity. This modern issue reflects a unique intersection between the Qur'anic ban on interest and the fear that Muslims do not

currently live up to the standards of morality mandated by the Qur'an and the Sunna. Since the amount paid as a penalty may not be taken as a profit, modern jurists who exercise their juridical preference in this matter oblige the recipients of penalty interest to donate these funds on behalf of the defaulting borrower to a charity of the borrower's choice. Other scholars are not comfortable with this approach, but they have not voiced outrage or deep opposition to this practice because they find that there may be an overriding public benefit (*istislah*) to it.

Customary usage (*'urf*) is also accepted as a basis for rulings and judgments, provided it does not contravene or contradict Islamic values and principles.[23] For instance, when we examine Islamic mortgage alternatives, we learn that one provider has secured a ruling allowing a shareholder to pay real estate taxes on the property, even though she is not the primary or majority owner of the property. This is consistent with local usage and is justified in that the real estate taxes inure almost exclusively to the benefit of the consumer. The systematic study of modern commercial legislation in the West and its applicability to the objectives of Islamic law have begun only recently. This fact was pointed out by Yusuf DeLorenzo in a paper delivered before the International Islamic Financial Standards Board: "In the classical system, custom (*'urf*) played an important role. The legal maxim that 'all transactions are to be considered lawful as long as they include nothing that is prohibited' went hand in hand with custom and mercantile practice in clearing the way for innovation in trade and commerce. However, when the Shariah boards of the modern Islamic banks began their work in the 70's, there was no significant Shariah-compliant trade taking place, and thus no customary practice in regard to it."[24] In matters of *ijtihad,* once the collectivity of Muslim scholars (*ulama*) have formed a consensus about the soundness of an interpretation on a point of law, the differing opinions of one or a few scholars are not sufficient to overturn or invalidate the consensus.

Inductive reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*) is not popular with some modern Muslims as a means of determining legal precepts.[25] However, an authentic hadith of the Prophet Muhammad reports the verbal instructions of the Prophet to Mu'adh ibn Jabal when he was appointed as governor of Yemen. The Prophet asked how he would determine affairs. Mu'adh replied that he would first turn to the Book of God; if he could not find the answer there, he would apply the Sunna of the Prophet; and if he could not find an answer there, then he said, "I shall decide according to my own opinion." The Prophet was pleased with his answer, for it meant that Mu'adh's opinion would be an informed one. Mu'adh's appointment was confirmed and with it the acceptance of reasoning (*qiyas*) as a means of legislating practical matters in Islam.[26] As DeLorenzo summarizes: "It is the nature of Islamic jurisprudence itself to insist on the freedom of qualified jurists to formulate and hold their own opinions. In fact, the inner dynamic for renewal known as *ijtihad* ensures the relevance of Islamic law to changing circumstances by

empowering jurists to constantly revisit points of law and to improve upon them when and where necessary."[27]

Ijtihad is the most flexible interpretive tool that Muslims can apply in their continuous reinterpretation of authentic scriptural texts.[28] However, the flexibility available to Muslims in commerce means that they should not lean too heavily upon *ijtihad* as a tool to seek rulings that help them achieve goals that push the outer limits of what the Shari'a permits. Especially since determinations made under this approach are susceptible to modification or replacement by a future interpretation.[29]

Consensus (*ijma'*) is as much an outcome as a source of juristic principle. Once the community of jurists are in broad agreement about the *ijtihad* of one or more of their members—the *qiyas* of a qualified scholar, the public benefit that comes from an action or application of a rule, or the validity of a custom—then their common commitment to such a decision constitutes *ijma'*. However, one must be cautioned that many times, Muslims have confused *ijma'* with their local customs, which may or may not have a basis in the core sources of Shari'a. Such customs may even introduce innovations that are contrary to precepts enshrined in the primary sources of the Shari'a.[30] *Ijma'*, as practiced by qualified jurists, has been a fundamental tool of Islamic jurisprudence and points toward the necessity of consultation (*shura*) among scholars, jurists, various experts, and the people as a whole. In commerce, the challenge for Muslims is to understand that such tools are meant to facilitate compliance with the Shari'a as opposed to circumventing it.

Collectively, the methods of "law-finding" discussed above are referred to as *usul al-fiqh,* the roots of Islamic jurisprudence.[31] They provide the methods whereby Muslims derive guidance for everyday life, including commerce, in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunna. Historically, the approach of Muslim scholars has been to avoid codification of the results of *ijtihad*. For this reason, the evolution of *fiqh* interpretations has closely paralleled the Anglo-American tradition of Common Law in the building of judicial consensus upon the interpretive endeavors of individual judges.[32]

For ordinary Muslim, a simple understanding of *fiqh* allows the individual to distinguish among five categories of activity: obligatory, recommended, permitted, discouraged, or forbidden. Neither commerce nor finance is an obligatory action (*fard* or *wajib*). However, every Muslim looks upon the example of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and his beloved wife Khadija as inspirations to engage in commerce. Muhammad was a merchant who was so honest that he earned the honorific *al-Amin,* "The Trustworthy One." When Khadija, a local businesswoman, employed him, he so impressed her with his integrity that she proposed marriage to him. This example from the Prophet's early life teaches Muslims that honest and decent commerce is *mandub,* an act which is recommended but not required of the faithful. Taking the Prophet as their inspiration, Muslims traveled the world for commerce.

In East Asia and the far reaches of Africa, Islam spread with the positive impression made by Muslim merchants. As often as not, the honesty that was a trademark of the Prophet was the calling card of Muslim merchants. On the one hand, the unique class of faith-driven merchants would typically devote themselves to the kinds of commerce that were considered *mubah* in Islamic law: acts about which the Shari'a is neutral. Such acts make up the preponderance of commercial behavior. In other words, most goods and business practices that one may find in the market do not violate the rules that guide Muslims. On the other hand, those same Muslim merchants would have likely avoided activities considered *makruh*—behavior that is discouraged for the believers, but not explicitly forbidden. When it comes to the *makruh,* this might mean avoiding things that may lead to forbidden behavior or commerce. For instance, if a merchant brokers barley in the food industry, this is permissible behavior. But, what if the merchant has good reason to believe that his buyer would sell the grain to a brewery? The trade would not be forbidden, without proof or evidence that the purpose of purchasing barley would be to brew beer. But, it would certainly be discouraged.

All Muslim merchants and financiers who observe the faith avoid the *haram* or *mamnu'*—forbidden activities that constitute major sins for the believer. The Shari'a provides clear guidance about the forbidden. For instance, Jabir ibn Abdallah reported that the Prophet Muhammad forbade the sale of wine, the carcasses of animals that had died, swine, and idols. All of these are forbidden to Muslims in the Qur'an, but this hadith adds the further proviso that Muslims should avoid making a profit on forbidden things, even by selling them to those for whom they are not forbidden.[33]

In the world of investing, the Islamic perspective allows Muslims to buy stocks listed in the global markets so long as the company in which one invests is not engaged directly in forbidden activities. Determining this requires a processes similar to that used by the socially responsible asset manager.[34] Income derived from forbidden or doubtful transactions must be purified and may be taken from the dividend or gains upon sale prior to distribution to investors. The screening process follows two general procedures. The first procedure is applied at the industry level and the second at the financial level. From the perspective of the Shari'a, Muslims are not allowed to enrich themselves in ways that are contrary to the rights of God, to the rights of the contracting parties, and even to the rights of third parties. In asset management, this means first and foremost avoiding specifically forbidden areas of investment, which include those banks and insurers that are involved with *riba* (discussed below); the sale, production, and distribution of alcoholic beverages; gambling; unsavoury entertainment; and the like.[35]

Although it is relatively straightforward to identify *haram* or non-permissible businesses, the screening of financial instruments is only

beginning to evolve. For example, a growing plurality of modern scholars permits one to invest in a company so long as its exposure to interest is limited to five percent or less of revenues, because it is incidental and the core income is permissible.[36] But, what if a stock represents an investment in a company with significant borrowings at interest?

When it comes to deciding how much debt may be carried by a company in which one invests, modern Islamic scholars look to a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad stated that "one third is big or abundant." A further ruling relating to "mixture" (*khalut*) has been adapted to govern the modern mixture of borrowed funds with nonborrowed funds in a company's capital structure. As a result, Islamic scholars have concluded, "The majority deserves to be treated as the whole thing."[37] Thus, a listed company borrowing more than 33 percent of its capital is not a permissible target for investment, and a listed company that has cash and monetary equivalents of 50 percent or more is treated as if the assets are cash: its sale is impermissible as it is buying money for money at a different price.

Thus, over more than 1400 years since the Qur'an was revealed, Muslims have become adaptive, yet they have remained committed to the application of the Shari'a in the regulation of commerce. However, even though one usually finds pluralities or majorities of scholars agreeing on a particular interpretation, seldom is the majority great enough to constitute a true consensus, or *ijma'*.

Some have argued that the traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence are incapable of addressing modern problems. This is because of a prevalent view among Western scholars of Islam and some Muslims that traditional *ijtihad* has ceased to inform civil law and commerce. However, the traditional schools of jurisprudence have well-defined methods to analyze classical texts and prior scholarly views and provide a clear approach to problem solving and legal decision making on the basis of each school's approach to *usul al-fiqh.*

When we examine modern legal rulings and scholarly research, we find that *ijtihad* remains a viable and lively tool, albeit applied with great care. When a Muslim jurist or Islamic scholar engages in *ijtihad,* he realizes that an error in judgment not only affects him but also has repercussions that may affect many other people as well. Thus, he pursues *ijtihad* with great caution. In Islam, the role of the *mufti,* the person eligible to issue a *fatwa,* is fundamentally a marriage of the spiritual and the legal.[38] The qualifications of a *mufti* require a broad mastery of skills: "The prerequisites for being a mufti are that a person be knowledgeable of the law with regard to primary rules, secondary rules, disagreements, and [legal] schools; that he possess the tools of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in their entirety; and that he be familiar with whatever he needs in order to derive judgments; namely, [Arabic] grammar, biographical information, and commentary on the verses that are revealed with respect to the laws and the narratives in them."[39]

When it comes to the *fiqh* of commerce, the emphasis of the various schools is on assuring that the businessperson knows the boundaries of permissibility and illegality relating to the chosen practice. The businessperson must behave with decency and fairness and he must seek a mutual benefit for all participants in a transaction. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said, "The accepted [pleasing to God] transaction is the transaction that takes place with mutual benefit for both the buyer and the seller."[40]

CENTRAL CONCERNS OF THE SHARI'A IN COMMERCIAL LAW

The concept of secularism—the separation of worldly life from religious life—is not the same for Muslims as it is for most Westerners. If a person is truly a steward of the created world on behalf of God, its true owner, then that person's freedoms are constrained by the responsibilities of stewardship in such areas as sociology, politics, economics, and law. In other words, under the Shari'a, all social sciences are interdependent.[41] However, in most Muslim societies, much of the time, life is similar to the way it is in a so-called secular society. Tolerance and the rule of law are meant to pervade Islamic social life just as they are in the West. An intriguing example is the Islamic marriage contract, which is a civil contract defining rights and obligations and not a holy sacrament.

In commerce, the starting point for this interdependence of faith and secular life is the belief that all worldly wealth is a trust given to humanity by God. As a result, a businessperson never truly transacts with his or her "personal" property; rather, the transaction is with property entrusted to one's control for the duration of one's life. This means that the Shari'a necessarily interferes in the dynamics of transactions to assure that each party acts in accordance with God's justice. Historically, this has meant that Muslim jurists have placed great emphasis on the terms and procedures of contract law and contractual relations, and the nature of contracts remains a matter of great concern for Muslims today. This is because violations of the rules of contracts are among those areas that are most liable to cause injustice in commercial dealings.

Unlawful Interest (Riba)

The Qur'an explicitly bans a practice called *riba* in four separate verses. Each of these Qur'anic verses affirms the absolute nature of the prohibition. However, the details of what *riba* entails in actual practice are not clearly defined.[42] In order of revelation, the verses of the Qur'an that forbid *riba* are the following:

> That which you give as *riba* to increase the people's wealth increases not with God; but what you give in charity, seeking the goodwill of God, multiplies many-fold.
>
> (Qur'an 30:39)

> For taking *riba,* even though it was forbidden to them, and their wrongful appropriation of other people's property, We have prepared for those among them who reject faith a grievous punishment.
>
> (Qur'an 4:161)

> Oh Believers, take not *riba,* doubled and redoubled, but fear God so that you may prosper. Fear the fire, which has been prepared for those who reject faith, and obey God and the Prophet so that you may receive mercy.
>
> (Qur'an 3:130)

> Those who benefit from *riba* shall be raised like those who have been driven to madness by the touch of the devil; this is because they say that "trade is like *riba,*" while God has permitted trade and forbidden *riba.* Hence, those who have received the admonition from their Lord and desist [from taking further *riba*], may keep their previous gains, their case being entrusted to God; but those who revert shall be the inhabitants of the Fire and abide therein forever.
>
> (Qur'an 2:274)

The Qur'an warns that anyone who is involved with the practice of *riba* faces the wrath of God and His Messenger on the Day of Judgment. The details that allow one to determine what this term means are found in the Hadith. The attempt to create lending practices that do not depend on *riba* has led to the development of the field of Islamic banking, which has achieved exceptionally high growth rates in recent years.[43] Unlike commercial banks in the West, an Islamic bank is obliged to erect screens against the practice of *riba* and seek socially beneficial returns. Modern Islamic banks rely on *ijtihad* to adapt classical opinions on sales and leasing to the development of a process of ethical and socially responsible banking that respects the Qur'anic ban on *riba.* The development of Islamic banking has not been without controversy or challenge. A major reason for this disagreement is the fact that there are only six hadiths that give clues to the meaning of *riba* in a modern context.[44] However, a scholarly consensus is beginning to emerge, especially in the Gulf region, about the current state of Islamic banking and about the best ways to improve the system.

The scholarly view of *riba* turns on traditions like that of Anas ibn Malik in the "Book of Sales" in the *Sunan* of Bayhaqi, who reported that the Prophet Muhammad said: "When a person grants a loan and the borrower offers him

a dish [in payment for something other than a dish], he should not accept it; and if the borrower offers a ride on an animal [in payment], he should not ride, unless the two of them have been previously accustomed to exchanging such favors mutually.''[45] The classical interpretation of *riba* is that there are two forms of *riba: riba al-nasiyya,* which is interest on a loan of money; and *riba al-fadl,* which is a repayment in excess when commodities of the same type are traded.[46] According to the concept of inductive reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*) in Islamic law, these interpretations of *riba* are applied to any monetary commodity, whether it is mentioned in the Hadith or is a new custom that is found in modern commercial markets. According to the classical understanding of *riba,* the trading of money for money, whether it is in the form of a hand-to-hand transaction or a loan over time, is not an approved business practice under the Shari'a. This notion is based on the idea that money is not a ''commodity'' in itself, merely reflecting a ''time value'' for a return. Rather, money is a measuring tool and value determinant, devoid of its own integral value.

Deception in Business Transactions (Gharar)

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said, ''Do not contract to buy merchandise on the way to the market, but wait until it is brought to the market [so that its fair price is established].''[47] The Prophet also said, ''It is impermissible to sell a thing if one knows that it has a defect, unless one informs the buyer of the defect.''[48] These traditions are examples of ethical exhortations against the practice of *gharar*. The majority of Islamic scholars consider *gharar* as ''both ignorance of the material attributes of the subject matter of a sale, and uncertainty regarding its availability and existence.''[49] The description of *gharar* in the Hadith is broad and implies an insistence on contractual transparency, full relevant disclosure, and fairness in the transacting environment. Restrictions on the practice of *gharar,* which may range from explicitly forbidding certain actions to tolerating an incidental oversight, are important means of preventing one party from improperly consuming the wealth of another.

Gharar literally means ''deception.'' Hence, the best definition of *gharar* in business is ''deception based on preventable ambiguity or uncertainty.'' In Shari'a, for *gharar* to invalidate a contract, the deception must not be trivial, it must relate to the object of the contract, and it must conflict with established business practice. However, in the view of many jurists, certain forms of *gharar* may be tolerated if an overriding public interest or benefit (*maslaha*) is involved.[50] The key to the assessment of *gharar* is that the deception that is to be prohibited must be based on a *preventable* uncertainty. This does not apply to the idea of risk in general, which is normal in the ordinary course of business.[51]

The practice of full disclosure and the maintenance of open and transparent markets are some of the best ways to prevent *gharar*. As a result, many Islamic scholars take comfort in the forms of disclosure and consumer protections that are utilized in modern Western markets. Many scholars believe that these highly regulated consumer markets should be emulated in the developing economies of the modern Muslim world.

CONTRACTS

The Arabic word for contract is *'aqd,* which comes from a root that means "to bind or tie tightly." The strength of the "binding" defined by this word is given in its Qur'anic usages, which refer to the highest order of mutual binding, whether among believers or between God and human beings: "Oh you who believe, fulfill your contracts" (Qur'an 5:1). The concept of the contract in Islamic law is similar in many ways to that in Western legal systems. The Shari'a distinguishes among contracts, promises, commitments, dispositions, and expressed intentions.[52] Whenever one or more of these actions are undertaken, it becomes an object of law and is thus subject to specific rules in the Shari'a.

In order to be valid according to the Shari'a, a contract must be a freely undertaken mutual binding of two legally competent parties. Typically, a contract in Islam relates to the exchange or use of property (*milk*) or money (*mal*).[53] The contract is binding so long as its object is not repugnant to the Shari'a. In addition, a valid contract must offer a provision for the contracting parties to withdraw from the agreement. 'Abdallah ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet Muhammad said, "There is no [binding] transaction between two persons that undertake a transaction until they separate [after concluding the transaction], but only if there is an option to annul it."[54] If one party fails to abide by the terms of the contract, his action may be subject to a penalty. Although Islamic jurists prefer written contracts to unwritten agreements, unwritten agreements have specific rules that affect the enforceability of the contract.

Islamic law bestows extensive rights and privileges upon contracting parties. According to a famous hadith, "Everything that is not prohibited is permissible."[55] However, a contract should not contain any stipulation that frustrates the nature and purpose of the contract itself.[56] For instance, payment for a good or a service or delivery of a good or a service may be deferred, so long as the stipulation is properly recorded and witnessed.[57] The leading schools of Islamic law differ somewhat over the nature of contracts and contractual obligations, but they do not differ over the key principles of a contract. Moreover, when a jurist finds an invalid stipulation in a contract, like most Western judges he will usually limit his action to

requiring the removal of the invalid stipulation. If a single invalid stipulation does not affect the overall terms of a contract, the contract is allowed to remain in force.

Unilateral assertions, such as verbal promises made during a negotiation, imply an obligation to act in a certain way. However, they do not have the legal stature of a contract, in which two parties make specific commitments to one another. Under Islamic law, a promise is not regarded as an implied contract; rather, it is seen as a unilateral expression of the promisor's willingness to perform an act, transfer a right, or refrain from doing something. A contract entails both a legal and a moral duty to carry out its provisions and is fully enforceable under the law. A promise, however, is solely a moral obligation, and thus may not be enforceable.[58]

In order to be legally valid, an Islamic contract must include a formal offer (*ijab*) and a formal acceptance (*qabul*). Once written or verbal statements confirm the offer and the acceptance, the contracting parties are liable for their obligations under the contract.[59] A valid contract under the Shari'a, however, also requires that the terms of the contract must be permissible under the Shari'a: an object of sale must be specific and free from *gharar*, and generally, the object should exist at the time of the contract.[60] The Islamic law of contracts accepts certain modifications due to unavoidable contingencies. The theory of contingencies is based on a core concept of equity and justice at the heart of the Shari'a.[61] Likewise, certain options allow contracting parties to validate the offer and acceptance of their proposed counter-parties. The key principle is that the contract should be transparent. According to DeLorenzo, "By insisting that Muslims transact by means of a specific set of well-defined contracts, the Shariah ensures that all parties have every opportunity to understand what they are getting themselves into when they transact. The classical Islamic system of *mu'amalat* (transactions) is so highly articulated for precisely this reason. While the scriptural foundations of that system may be abbreviated, owing to their delineation of principles rather than specifics, the dynamic of *ijtihad* inherent to *fiqh* has ensured that Muslim jurists, and especially Shariah boards, continue to comment and build upon the theoretical constructs."[62]

In general, Islamic scholars and jurists have been traditionally quite comfortable with allowing a business-friendly approach to contracting and contract fulfillment. For instance, one party may appoint a third party to fulfill his or her obligations as an agent. This gives rise to the broad concept of agency (*wakala*) in Islam. Muslim jurists have granted substantial liberty for the contracting parties to appoint an agent to complete a transaction. This might even include a seller appointing the buyer as an agent to outsource goods for sale to the buyer as the seller's agent.[63]

Possession (Qabd)

Wealth, in every conceivable form, is created by God and is thus His property. This view is derived from the following Qur'anic verses: "Give to them from the property of Allah which He has bestowed upon you" (Qur'an 24:33); "Have they not seen that, among the things made by our own hands, We have created cattle for them, and thus they acquired the right of property over them?" (Qur'an 36:71). Clearly, the rights we hold over "our" property are subject to divine injunction and guidance.[64] The punishment for those who take property unlawfully is significant: "He who wrongly takes a span of land will be made to wear it around his neck...on the Day of Judgment."[65] From verses and traditions such as these, it is reasonable to conclude that the possession of private property is permissible in Islam.

Ibn 'Abbas reported that the Prophet Muhammad said, "He who buys food grain should not sell it, until he has weighed it [and then taken possession of it]." Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet said, "He who buys food grain should not sell it until he has taken full possession of it."[66] Thus, the provenance of things to be sold must be made clear, as should the specific disclosure of the contract's objects.

Shari'a scholars define two forms of possession: physical (*haqiqi*) and constructive (*hukmi*). The former is self-evident and means that an object is within the physical control of a party with all the attendant rights and liabilities.[67] Possession, whether physical or constructive, means that one is able to deliver a good as contracted. Historically, Islamic courts have been willing to vouch for contracts of sale, no matter the distance required for delivery, so long as the provenance of the object and the capacity of the seller to deliver the object could be validated.[68] Although most traditional scholars were of the opinion that possession requires the existence of the object to be contracted, the Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya pointed out that the prohibition of the sale of nonexistent objects was meant to be a prohibition only of those things that are subject to excessive or nontrivial forms of deception (*gharar*).[69] The exception from this rule of other forms of *gharar* facilitates forms of commerce that meet public need without entering into types of transactions that are repugnant to the Shari'a.

Accountability

According to Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "The market, its prices and sales, should be left free to respond to internal economic forces and natural competition without manipulation." This juridical opinion is based on the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: "If people are left alone, God will give them provision from one another."[70] This point leads us to understand

that merchants are to be accountable in Islam and that governments have the responsibility to oversee markets as fair and level fields of competition. This is an important point because many types of contracts are either explicitly forbidden according to their form or are centered on a forbidden object or purpose. Often, merchants seek to disguise such activities. For example, many Muslims engage in fictitious sales that emulate a loan of money at interest. Such sales are known as *hila* ("legal fictions") and entail a buyer selling an object to another person and then buying it back at a different price. The difference is the amount of interest that would have been accrued in an interest-based transaction. Such deceptive contracts are meant to disguise a forbidden transaction as if it were permissible. Although the merchant who contracts a *hila* is accountable to God, the historical view of Muslim scholars has been that governments should prevent such deceptions to the best of their ability.

IJTIHAD UNDER MODERN CONDITIONS OF COMMERCE

According to the hadith that states, "Everything that is not prohibited is permissible," much of what we transact in modern commerce is permissible in Islam, with the caveat that we must not engage in *riba* or *gharar*. On the one hand, this rule means that one must study modern commercial and financial arrangements carefully to determine their validity and consistency with Islamic principles. On the other hand, contemporary society has some new needs, new customs, and many blends of cultures and rules. As a result, once the analysis of contemporary commercial and financial arrangements is complete, modern Muslims need to construct authentic Islamic alternatives, not *hiyal* that circumvent the purposes of the Shari'a. For such a purpose *ijtihad* is required. The context for *ijtihad* is that "the door is wide-open for the adoption of anything of utility, of whatever origin, so long as it does not go against the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna."[71] The great classical jurist Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya established three rules for *ijtihad:* (1) it may be applied in the absence of specific guidance in the Qur'an and the Sunna; (2) it should not contravene the Shari'a; (3) it should not lead to such a complicated expression that people either lose their attachment to the Shari'a or become confused about its established principles.[72]

As a practical matter, the outcome of modern innovation in the financial markets is a corpus of *fatawa* (the plural of *fatwa*), legalistic rulings by contemporary Muslim scholars that enable financial institutions, investors, and consumers to engage in commercial transactions. These *fatawa* are examples of *ijtihad* and are executed by scholars on the basis of their analysis of authentic sources, the facts of a proposed financial or commercial instrument or transaction, and prior precedents.[73] One hadith

is particularly helpful in tempering the use of *ijtihad:* ''Do not permit an error of opinion to become a tradition for the community.''[74] To this end, we are reminded that the Qur'an itself warns us that even inspired judges are subject to error.[75]

The culture of Islamic business relies on a close interaction between the legal and spiritual aspects of religion. For complex reasons, Muslims have allowed themselves to become less proactive in the modernization of commerce than they have been in other areas of modern endeavor, such as technology. This inactivity has included less engagement in the problems of finance and commerce by Islamic scholars and thinkers. As a result, the modern Muslim businessperson faces unique challenges when operating in the modern marketplace. What should one do, for example, if one's business model is valid according to Shari'a principles, but the market generates risks of interacting with businesses that are not Shari'a compliant? How does one engage in finance if Shari'a rules governing finance are unknown in the market and, perhaps, alien to regional customs? Muslim communities have dealt with similar challenges in the past. The outcome of their struggles has been documented in the works of the leading schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The results of these endeavors are now being revisited and adapted to modern circumstances. The majority of these developments have been invisible to the greater public, but some are influencing business practices around the world as Islamic investing is providing new alternatives in the ethical investing market. For emerging markets that are deeply in need of reform, there is a clear advantage in reviving the Prophet Muhammad's model of honesty or integrity.

NOTES

(Ed.) following a note signifies that the note was added by the general editor of this set.

1. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* trans. Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Beirut: Dar al-'Arabiyya, n.d.), vol. 3, 151–152.

2. Mohammad Adam El-Sheikh, ''The Applicability of Islamic Penal Law (*Qisas* and *Diyah*) in the Sudan'' (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Religion, 1986), xviii.

3. Muhammad Taqi Usmani, ''The Principle of Limited Liability,'' in Muhammad Imran Ashraf Usmani, *Meezan Bank Guide to Islamic Banking* (Karachi, Pakistan: Darul Ishaat, 2002), 223–232. Although predisposed to the concept, Justice Usmani has not finalized his view.

4. Abdur Rahman Doi, *Shariah: The Islamic Law* (London, U.K.: Ta Ha Publishers, 1984), 449.

5. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law: An Analysis of Futures and Options* (Selangor, Malaysia: Ilmiah Publishers, 2002), 73.

6. El-Sheikh, ''Islamic Penal Law,'' 15–18.

7. This is independent from the separate theological argument that property is not owned by the individual, but is held by human beings in trust for God, who is the actual owner; thus, human beings are merely the caretakers of this world and its contents.

8. Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law,* 67; Kamali deduces from this that it is not sufficient to presume that a contract is forbidden if its type or terms are not explicitly forbidden.

9. Ibid., 69.

10. Lakhdar O'Barrett, ''Towards a Green Planet: Why Islam Holds the Keys to a Sustainable World,'' *Al Jumuah* 16, no. 12, Dhu al-Hijja 1425 (March 2005), 34.

11. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, ''Khurshid Ahmad: Muslim Activist-Economist,'' in *Islamic Resurgence*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 2000), 50. For an exhaustive discussion of *Zakat,* see Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Zakat* (London, U.K.: Dar Al Taqwa, 1996). Another outlet for wealth that is used to help others is the charitable trust (*waqf*), which is not discussed in detail in this article. A useful resource on *waqf* is Dahi Al-Fadhli and Abdulkader Thomas, *Characteristics of the Historical Formation of Awqaf* (April 16, 2005), accessed at www.ajif.org.

12. Rodney Wilson, ''Parallels between Islamic and Ethical Banking,'' *Review of Islamic Economics,* no. 11 (2002): 51–62.

13. Said Ramadan, *Islamic Law: Its Scope and Equity* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1992), 43. Ramadan indicates that there are ten specific economic and financial injunctions in the Qur'an, which I have reduced to three primary categories.

14. Ibn Maja, *Sunan Ibn Maja* (Cairo: Issa Al Halabi Press, 1952), 42–43. Often, this hadith is cited as proof that Islam is against any form of innovation. In fact, the specific reference is to innovation in the defined beliefs and practices (*ʿaqida*) of Islam. Muslims have historically understood that the prohibition of innovation relates to matters of belief and worship, but not to science and commerce.

15. El-Sheikh, ''Islamic Penal Law,'' 41–42; see also, Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Period,* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 2002).

16. El-Sheikh, ''Islamic Penal Law,'' 1.

17. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (London, U.K.: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 26.

18. Fathi Osman, *Sharia in Contemporary Society: The Dynamics of Change in the Islamic Law* (Los Angeles, California: Multimedia Vera International, 1994), 19.

19. Ramadan, *Islamic Law*, 33; Ramadan believes, unlike Nasr, that the traditional order is not immutable. The root of *ijtihad* is *j-h-d*, which means, ''to strive or make a strenuous effort.'' *Ijtihad* is the eighth form intensification of this root, which also gives us the third form term *jihad* or ''defensive effort.''

20. Classically, following the *Risala* of Imam al-Shafiʿi (d. 820 CE), the four sources of Islamic law are listed as Qur'an, Sunna, *ijmaʿ*, and *qiyas.*

21. Fuad Al-Omar and Munawar Iqbal, "Some Strategic Suggestions for Islamic Banking in the 21st Century," in *Review of Islamic Economics*, 9, 2000, 49.

22. See Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law*, 99.

23. Besim S. Hakim, "The Role of *'Urf* in Shaping the Traditional Islamic City," in *Islam and Public Law,* ed. Chibli Mallat (London, U.K.: Graham & Trotman, 1993), 141; Hakim sees *'urf* as a subset of *'ada* (habitual practice), which was the basis for not overturning local customary practices in the opinions of the early Muslim jurists (144). See also, Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law*, 79–81.

24. Yusuf DeLorenzo, "Shariah Boards and Modern Islamic Finance: From the Jurisprudence of Revival and Recovery to the Jurisprudence of Transformation and Adaptation" (paper presented to the International Islamic Financial Standards Board, London, U.K., May 2004).

25. This applies almost in equal measure to the political Rejectionists of our time in the Al Qaeda movement and some young Western educated Islamic reformists as well as some traditionalists residing in the West.

26. 'Umar S. Al-Ashqar, *al-Qiyas* (Kuwait: Dar al-Salafiyya, 1979), 44–5.

27. DeLorenzo, "Shariah Boards and Modern Islamic Finance."

28. El-Sheikh, "Islamic Penal Law," 28; however, as we shall see below, *ijtihad* requires significant training, and established religious authorities have been at pains to point out that modern rejectionist groups like Al Qaeda's Egyptian predecessor *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* have no right to apply *ijtihad* on the basis of their relatively limited learning and their narrow political aims. See Bernard Botiveau "Contemporary Reinterpretations of Islamic Law: The Case of Egypt" in *Islam and Public Law,* ed. Mallat, 274.

29. Osman, *Shari'a in Contemporary Society,* 23. Osman goes on to propose that the role of *ijtihad* may result in distinct rulings applicable in Muslim majority societies as compared to Muslim minority communities in the West, p. 26.

30. El-Sheikh, "Islamic Penal Law," 49.

31. See Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence,* in which Motzki aligns the *usul al-fiqh* approach to Imam Shafi'i in the second century of the Hijra.

32. DeLorenzo, "Shariah Boards and Modern Islamic Finance.

33. *Sahih Muslim bi-sharh an-Nawawi,* (Cairo: 1924), 830; see also, *Sahih al-Bukhari,* trans. Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 233–236 and 241.

34. Muhammad Elgari, unpublished interview with Omar Fisher for *The American Journal of Islamic Finance* (January 24, 1997).

35. Munawar Iqbal, "Wealth Creation: An Islamic Perspective" (presented at the "Seminar on Wealth Creation," Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom, July 2003).

36. Usmani, "The Principle of Limited Liability," 211–212.

37. Ibid., 214–215; See also, Introduction by Muhammed Imran Usmani, 208–209.

38. Barber Johansen, "Legal Literature and the Problem of Change: the Case of Land Rent," in *Islam and Public Law,* ed. Mallat, 35.

39. David S. Powers, "Legal Consultation (*Futya*) in Medieval Spain and North Africa," in *Islam and Public Law,* ed. Mallat, 89, citing Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad b.

Yahya al Wansharisi (d. 1508 CE) *al Mi'yar al-Mughrib wa jami' al-mu'rib 'an fatawa ahl Ifriqiyya wa al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib* (Rabat: Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, 1981–1983), vol. 10, 31.

40. Houcine Chouat, "Guidelines for Marking up Goods for Profit," *Al Jumuah* 17, no. 3 (July 2005): 20.

41. The idea that Islam is a system or order (*nizam*) in which the social, economic, and political sciences are interrelated developed among Muslim reformist thinkers in British India around the time of the Second World War. In 1943, Mawlana Hamid al-Ansari Ghazi described Islam as an integrated political system. In 1942, Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) used the Urdu term *Islami nizam* ("Islamic order") in a speech about Islamic ideology. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ideologist Seyyid Qutb (d. 1966) derived the concept of the Islamic System from Mawdudi. In his influential manifesto *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones), written in 1964, Qutb warns Muslim youths to avoid Western theories about "the interpretation of human endeavor. . . the explanation of the origin of the universe, [and] the origin of the life of man." This concern led to the development of an intellectual movement known as the "Islamization of Knowledge." First set out in Chapter 8 of *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* ("The Islamic Concept and Culture" [*al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa al-thaqafa*]), the Islamization of Knowledge was promoted in greater detail by Ismail Faruqi in the United States and Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in Malaysia. See Seyyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-'Ilm, n.d.), 109–110, and the Arabic edition of this work, idem., *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 2000), 139. On the origin of the concept of the Islamic System, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962; repr., Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1991), 274 n. 10. (Ed.)

42. On the subject of *riba,* see Abdulkader Thomas, ed., *Interest in Islamic Economics: Understanding Riba* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). This book provides a detailed analysis from legal, economic, and historical perspectives about the concept of *riba* and why it is forbidden. A key conclusion of the book is that interest on a loan of money is clearly *riba*.

43. See Abdulkader Thomas with Stella Cox and Bryan Kraty, *Structuring Islamic Finance Transactions* (London, U.K.: Euromoney, forthcoming). Islamic banking has developed at a growth rate of approximately 17 percent per year in the Arabian Gulf region. The growth rate has been less robust, but strong nonetheless, in other parts of the Muslim world, such as South and Southeast Asia. Although the field of Islamic banking has developed rapidly over the last two decades, most Muslims around the world continue to use commercial banks as people do in the West. In addition, some countries, such as Iran, make a distinction between internal banking practices, which operate on Islamic principles, and international banking, which operates on commercial banking principles. (Ed.)

44. Usmani, "The Principle of Limited Liability," 39–44.

45. Ibid., 41.

46. Many scholars view the prohibition of *riba al-fadl* as "blocking the means" to *riba,* rather than as a prohibition of *riba* itself. In Thomas, *Interest in Islamic Economics*, Shaykh Wahba al-Zuhayli reviews rules relating to the restriction of unlawful gain in the trading of food commodities as distinct from monetary commodities.

47. *Sahih Muslim,* trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1992), vol. 3, 800. In *Sahih al-Bukhari,* trans. Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 199, the concept of *gharar* is characterized as the sale of that which is not present at the moment of sale.

48. *Sahih al-Bukhari,* trans. Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Vol. 3, 166.

49. Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law,* 85; elsewhere, Kamali compares *bay' al-ma'dum*, the sale of a nonexistent object, to *gharar* in that both take undue advantage of the ignorance of the purchaser.

50. Ibid., 85.

51. Ibid., 88.

52. Ala' Eddin Kharofa, *Transactions in Islamic Law* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: A.S. Noordeen, 1997), 7.

53. Doi, *Shariah,* 356.

54. *Sahih Muslim,* trans. Siddiqi, 804.

55. Ramadan, *Islamic Law,* 68.

56. Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law,* 131 and 76.

57. Ibid., 142; this interpretation is one of a variety of interpretations of Qur'an 2:276 ("Allah has blighted *riba* but has made acts of charity fruitful").

58. Kharofa, *Transactions in Islamic Law*, 26; however, according to some scholars, a verbal promise may be enforceable and subject to sanction. See Usmani, "The Principle of Limited Liability," 119 and Usmani, Introduction, 88.

59. Kharofa, *Transactions in Islamic Law,* 12.

60. Certain permissible contracts relate to objects that may not yet exist or are yet to be produced. They are permitted because of the limitation of intentional deception and the public good that they enable.

61. Kharofa, *Transactions in Islamic Law,* 42–43.

62. DeLorenzo, "Shariah Boards and Modern Islamic Finance."

63. *The Mejelle,* trans. C. R. Tyser et al. (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2001), 239–254.

64. Usmani, "The Principle of Limited Liability," 18.

65. *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Siddiqi, 847–848.

66. Ibid., 802; the rules of possession for grain and money are distinct from and more restrictive than those concerning other goods, as these are explicitly cited in the traditions governing *riba*. See also, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 192–195.

67. Usmani, "The Principle of Limited Liability," 79.

68. See Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times of Isma'il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 51.

69. Cited in Kamali, *Islamic Commercial Law*, 100.

70. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam,* trans. Kamal El Helbawy et al. (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, n.d.), 258–259.

71. Ibid., 71.

72. Ibid., 78.

73. Johansen, "Legal Literature and the Problem of Change," in *Islam and Public Law,* ed. Mallat, 32. *Fatawa* often take the form of a reduction of a legal school's view on a specific matter for public consumption; or they may be a view of the *mufti* (the person authorized to issue a *fatwa*), legitimized by the *mufti*'s standing and without specific indications of precedent or pointers to the authentic texts.

74. Ramadan, *Islamic Law*, 84.

75. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Appellate Review and Judicial Independence in Islamic Law," in *Islam and Public Law*, ed. Mallat, 64; in the Qur'an, the Prophet David, not Solomon, is the paradigmatic model for a judge. After describing the settlement of a dispute in which David's judgment proved to be a test of David by God, David is told: "Oh David, We have made you a vicegerent (*khalifa*) on Earth; therefore, judge between people in truth and do not follow the passions that would distract you from the way of God" (38:26).

Index

Ablutions *(wudu')*, 6–7, 8, 165
Abraham, use of "Uff," 99
Abu 'Abdallah al-Jala', 190
Abu al-Baddah at-Tujibi, 99
Abu 'Ali al-Juzjani, 192
Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, 109
Abu Raja' al-'Ataridi, 99
Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri, 190, 191
Abu Ya'qub al-Nahrajuri, 190
Accountability, 163, 214–15
Adab (ethical comportment), 182, 185–86, 188, 195–96 n.14
Adam, 46–47, 48, 80, 92 n.1
Adhan (call to prayer), 6, 7
Adoption, 21
Adultery, 58, 59
African American Muslims, 29
Afternoon prayer *(asr)*, 8
Aga Khan III (Sir Sultan Mohammed Shah), 71
Aga Khan IV, 72, 74 n.2
Agency *(wakala)*, in contracts, 213
Akhlaq (ethical conduct). *See* Ethical conduct
Alcohol drinking, 9, 17
Alcohol, sale of, 199, 207
'Ali al-Kattani, Muhammad ibn, 182
'Ali al-Qassab, Muhammad b., 182
Al-ihsan (goodness), 97
'Ali ibn Abu Talib (imam), 99, 110
"Ali Wants His Hand Back," 163
'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (imam), 127
Al-Layth, ibn Sa'id, 100
Alms Tax of Islam *(Zakat)*, 24–25, 96, 200–202
Al Qaeda, 218 nn.25, 28
Al-sahaba (companionship), 93
American Muslims, 27, 29, 30, 169
Al-Amin ("The Trustworthy"), 197, 206
Analogical reasoning *(qiyas)* in commercial law, 205, 211
Angel(s): ascension of the soul, 157–58; descent during death, 156–57, 170 n.4; on either shoulder, 128 n.2, 153; of Hell, 158; Interrogating Angels, 160; in the Qur'an, 117–19; views of humans, 136
Angel Gabriel, 117
Annulments, 64
Anonymity, 191–92
Ansari, 'Abdullah, 137, 139
Apocalypse, 177–78
'Aqd. See Contracts
'Aql (intellect), 80
Arabic language: marital formula *(sigha)* in, 61; noun and pronoun gender, 80, 92 n.1; obligation to pray in, 7
Arranged marriages, 41, 70
'Ashura (tenth day of Muharram), 40
Asma', 97
Asr (afternoon prayer), 8
Athar (sayings of Companions), 204
Austamis (fairs), 41
Autopsies, 152
Awami League, 40

Awliya' Allah ("Friends of God"), 183–87
Ayat al-ahkam (verses of legal rulings), 203

"The Balance" *(mizan),* 161
Bangladesh: demographics, 35–36; ethical business practices, 202; gender roles, 35–37, 46–50; government initiatives for equal rights, 36; legal system, 45–46; members of Parliament, 36, 54 n.7; Prime Minister, 50; research study in Purbadhala, 37–41
Banking practices, 202, 210–11, 219 n.43
Bara Pir (Zilani, Abdul Quadir), 44, 55 n.30
Barzakh (interval; isthmus), 158
Al-Basri, Hasan, 109, 110
Bathing: obligations, 9–10; preparing bodies for burial, 151–53, 163–67
Bathrooms, use of, 10
Baul singers, 40
Beliefs, relationship to organizations, 130, 143–44
Believers: *mu'min* (soul of the believer), 157; Qur'an on, 23, 32
Bestiality, 59
Bias, exclusionary power of, 51–52
Bible, principle of duality, 79
Bichar (village council), 45–46, 52
Bismillah blessing, 15–16
Blasphemy. *See* Cursing
Bodies. *See* Burial, preparing bodies for
Borrowed funds, 208, 210–11
Breastfeeding/nursing, 18, 22, 86, 107, 108
Breasts *(juyubihinna),* covering of, 13
Bride-gift. *See Mahr/mohr*
Bridge of Hell, 161
The Brothers Karamazov (Dostoevsky), 134
Buddhists: celibacy, 90; as marriage partners, 61
Burial, preparing bodies for, 151–53, 163–67
Burial shrouds, 164, 166–67
Burqa, 11–12, 44
Business: commercial law, sources of, 203–9; ethics and, 202–3, 207–8; interest, unlawful *(riba),* 204–5, 209–11, 215; Islamic law and, 197–98; stewardship, 200–201, 209
Business suits, 11

Caliphs: on *mut'a* (temporary) marriage, 68; on nonbelievers, 97; Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs, 74 n.1
Call to prayer *(adhan),* 6, 7
Celibacy, 58–59, 90
Cemeteries, fear of, 160–63
Chadar (Bengali), 43–44
Chador (Iranian), 11–12
Charity: donations of penalty interest, 204–5; effect of War on Terror on, 201; mandatory *(Zakat),* 24–25, 96, 200–201; voluntary (*Sadaqa*), 24, 95–96, 201
Childbirth: death during, 108–9, 111 n.8, 155; importance of, 107; Mary's isolation during, 137; personal account, 113–22
Children: child–parent relationships (*See* Parents); childrearing, 84–85, 86, 87, 107, 109–10; deaths of, 108, 155; education of, 72–73; equal treatment of, 110, 111 nn.20–22; rights of, 59
Chinese tradition, *Yin* and *Yang,* 79
Christianity: celibacy in, 90; Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary, 79; Jesus (Isa), virgin conception of, 118, 119; observance of *parda,* 50; saint-exemplar/"Man of God," 185, 187
Christians, as marriage partners, 61
Cleanliness. *See* Hygiene
Cleansing rituals: preparing bodies for burial, 151–53, 163–67; *wudu',* 6–7, 8
Commerce. *See* Business
Commercial law, sources of, 203–9
Community activities: mosques, 25–26; Muslim responsibilities, 23;

women's participation in, 22. *See also Umma*
Companionship *(al-sahaba),* 93
Companions of the Prophet: *athar* (sayings), 204; on charity, 24
Compulsion in marriage, 41, 70
Concubinage, 58
Conduct. *See* Ethical conduct
Consensus *(ijma'),* as basis for commercial law, 204, 206, 208
Constitutions, Muslim Family Law and, 57, 71
Consumer protection, 211–12
Contracts *('aqd):* business, 212–15; Islamic guidelines, 24, 200, 217 n.8, 220 n.60; juristic preference *(istihsan),* 204–5, 212–13; marital, 58, 60–66, 81–82
Corporations, 198
Creation: Adam and *Hawa* (Eve), 46–47, 48, 80, 92 n.1; duality principle in, 79, 80; of the soul, 157, 170 n.6
Crusades, Muslim views of, 28–29
Cultural considerations: burial, preparing bodies for, 151–53, 163–67; challenges of Muslim communities, 26–27; dress, 11–15; power and powerlessness, 51–53; religion and, 53
Cursing, of elderly parents, 97–98
Customary usage *('urf)*, in commercial law, 205

Daily life. *See* Muslim daily life
Darajat al-Dadiqin (Sulami), 184–86
David, 221 n.75
"Day of Separation." *See* Judgment Day
Death, 179; ascent of the soul, 157–59, 170 n.8; autopsies, 152; burial, preparing bodies for, 151–53, 163–67; burial shrouds, 164, 166–67; during childbirth, 108–9, 111 n.8, 155; "delirium of death," 156–57, 169 n.2; in disasters, 176–78; four statements, 160; funeral prayer *(salat al-janaza),* 167–68; graveyards, fear of, 160–63; invocation of *Shahada,* 124; murder, 153, 154–55, 169 n.1; Muslims in the United States and, 169, 171 n.23; personal reflections, 173–78; Qur'an and Hadith on, 159, 177; respect for parents after, 102–3; suicide, 6, 154, 155
Death, Angel of, 157
Debt and loans, 208, 210–11
Deception in business transactions *(gharar),* 211–12, 214, 219 nn.47, 49
Decision making prayer *(istikhara),* 19–20
"Delirium of death," 156–57, 169 n.2
Dental hygiene, 10
Derkaoui, Abdeslam, 89
Din. See Religion
Disasters, death in, 176–78
Disclosure in business transactions, 211–12
Discouraged *(makruh)* actions, 207
Dispute settlements, *shalish* (village council), 45–46, 48
Divine duality. *See* Duality, principle of
Divine grace, 177
Divine mercy *(al-Rahman),* 30–31, 87
Divine unity. *See Tawhid*
Divorce: impotence and, 85; *li'an* divorce, 64; Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 42–43; *Shari'a* law, 42, 70; Sunni Islamic law, 62; waiting period *('idda)* following, 63–64; while breastfeeding, 86
Dress, principles of, 10–15
Drink. *See* Alcohol drinking
Du'a for parents, 108
Duality, principle of, 60, 78–80, 92

Economic issues: banking practices, 202, 210–11, 219 n.43; charitable giving, 24–25, 95–96; contracts, 24, 212–15; earnings, 22, 50, 70; financial responsibility to parents, 95–96; inheritance rules, 43, 48; interest, unlawful *(riba),* 204–5, 209–11, 215; *mahr/mohr* (dowry),

41, 48, 49, 65–66, 84; transactions and contracts, 24, 211–15; women, right to financial support, 84–85; *Zakat* (Alms Tax of Islam), 24–25, 96, 200–201. *See also* Business
Education: under Nizari Ismaili Shi'ism, 72–73; as source of power, 51; teachers of ethical conduct, 183–87
Ego-self *(nafs),* 183, 190. *See also* Soul
Employer–employee relations, 24
Endowment *(waqf),* 202
"Enemy of the Houshold of the Prophet," 68, 74 n.1
Environment, stewardship of, 30–31, 200–201
Equal rights, Bangladesh government initiatives, 36
Ethical comportment *(adab),* 182, 185–86, 188, 195–96 n.14
Ethical conduct *(akhlaq):* business and investment, 202–3, 207–8; contemporary considerations, 181; saint-exemplars as teachers, 183–87; spirit/soul and, 182–83; Sufism as, 182, 193; al-Sulami, teachings of, 187–94
Eve *(Hawa),* 46–47, 48, 80, 88

Fahisha (illicit sex), 59
Fairs. *See Austamis*
Faisal, King, 199
Faith *(iman),* 138
Fajr prayer (morning prayer), 7, 8
Families: authority in *(saman adhikar),* 48; dysfunctional, 78, 83–84; filial loyalty, 88–89; names and lineage, importance of, 85, 89; responsibility to, 20–21, 202. *See also* Mothers; Parents
Family law. *See* Muslim Family Law
Family names, importance of, 85, 89
Faqir (practitioner of spiritual poverty), 188–93
Faqr (spiritual poverty), 188–93
Farid al-Din 'Attar, 131
Fasting, 18
Al-Fatiha ("The Opening"), 7, 167–68
Fatwa(s) (decree; legal opinion): Bangladesh legal system, 45–46; in contemporary law, 215–16
Feast of Fast-Breaking *('Id al-Fitr),* 15, 40
Feast of Sacrifice *('Id al-Adha),* 15, 40
Fifth Pillar of Islam. *See Hajj*
Filial loyalty, 88–89
Financial institutions, 40, 202. *See also* Banking practices
Financial issues. *See* Business; Economic issues
Fiqh (jurisprudence), 204–9, 212–15
First Pillar of Islam. *See Shahada*
"Fist of Maryam," 122
Five Pillars of Islam, 5
Foods: excesses of, 9; fasting, 18; *halal* (permitted), 16–17; *haram* (forbidden), 15–16, 17; sharing, 17
Forbidden *(haram)* actions. *See Haram*
Forbidden marriages, 62–64
Fourth Pillar of Islam. *See Sawm*
France, banning of head coverings, 12–13, 14
Friday prayers *(al-Salat al-Jumu'a),* 25
"Friends of God" *(awliya' Allah),* 183–87
Fundamentalists, secular views of, 2–3
Funeral prayer *(salat al-janaza),* 167–68

Gambling, 17, 25, 207
Gathering of the Bodies *(hashr al-ajsad),* 161
Gender roles: in Bangladesh, 35–37, 46–50, 52–53; dress, 10–15; education of girls, 72–73; marital roles (*See* Marriage); treatment of children, 111 n.22; unequal access to mosques, 25. *See also* Men; Women
Generosity, 140–44. *See also* Charity
Germany, head coverings, 14
Gharar (deception in business transactions), 211–12, 214, 219 nn.47, 49

Ghazzali, Ahmad, 135
God: presence of, 144, 147 n.32; rights of, 94
God-consciousness, 1–5
Goodness *(al-ihsan),* 97
Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, 40, 202
Graves: direction facing, 154; fear of cemeteries, 160–63; visiting, of nonbelieving parents, 102
Guardianship *(wilaya),* 62–63, 67
Guests, treatment of, 23
Guillaume-Barre Syndrome, 123–27

Hadith (Word of Muhammad), 145 n.2; on childrearing, 109; on death, 159; family law and, 57, 58; *maqbul* (accepted) and *mardud* (rejected), 203; narrators, 203; Pen *(qalam)* and Tablet *(lawhin),* 80; as source of commercial law, 203; text of in *Zalal al-fuqara* (Sulami), 189
Hadith qudsi, 145 n.2
Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), 27–28, 103
Hakim (physician/philosopher), 125
Halal (permitted) actions, 9, 16–17
Hanafi school of law: guardianship *(wilaya),* 64, 65, 69; marriage contract, 42, 49, 60–61
Hanbali school of law: guardianship *(wilaya),* 64–65; marriage contract, 60–61
Hannah, 116
Haram (forbidden) actions, 9; business practices, 207; food and drink, 15–16, 17; unequal treatment of children, 110
Hardship, removal of *(taysir),* 198, 204
Hashr al-ajsad (Gathering of the Bodies), 161
Hawa (Eve), 46–47, 48, 80, 88
Head coverings: men, 10–11; women, 12–14
Health insurance, 132–33, 139
Hell, 158, 161, 170 n.13
Hereafter, 160, 170 nn.15–16
Hijab (women's head covering), 12–14
Hila ("legal fictions"), 215
Hinduism: observance of *parda,* 50; *Purusha* and *Prakriti* symbols, 79
Hindus, as marriage partners, 61
Home *(maskan; sakina),* as peaceful refuge, 83
Homosexuality: Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 41; Qur'an on, 58, 59
Hospitals, 130–33, 139
"The Hour" *(al-Sa'a),* 158–59, 178
Household chores, 86
Husnan (kind speech), 94
Hygiene, obligations, 9–10
Hypocrisy *(nifaq),* 138

Ibn 'Abbas, Abdallah, 85, 86–87
Ibn 'Ajiba, Ahmad, 182, 184
Ibn al-Jala', 192
Ibn al-Musayyib, Sa'id, 99
Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, 214, 215
Ibn Hayyan, Muqatil, 95, 96
Ibn Jurayj, 96, 98
Ibn Kathir: on motherhood, 108; parents, treatment of, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98
Ibn Qayyim, 110
Ibn Taymiyya, 200
Ibn 'Uyaina, Sufyan, 108
'Id al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice), 15, 40
'Id al-Fitr (Feast of Fast-Breaking), 15, 40
Idolatry *(shirk),* 138, 146 n.18
Iftar (meal), 18
Ihsanan (kindness of speech), 94
Ijma' (consensus of jurists), 204, 206, 208
Ijtihad (making the effort; independent reasoning), 1, 57, 217 n.19; in commercial law, 204–6, 208, 209, 213; in contemporary society, 215–16, 218 n.28; in family law, 69
Illicit sex *(fahisha),* 59
Illness: as blessing, 126; personal accounts, 123–27, 130–36
Imam(s): funeral prayer *(salat al-janaza),* 167–68; Ismaili Shi'ism,

71, 72–73, 74 n.2; as *shalish* leader, 45; Shiite, on *mut'a,* 68; women as forbidden, 48
Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism: schools of law, 58; temporary marriage *(mut'a),* 61, 66–68
Impotence, 85
Incest, 58
Independent reasoning. *See Ijtihad*
India, Muslim Family Law, 57
Inductive reasoning *(qiyas)* in commercial law, 205, 211
Inheritance rules, 43, 48
Institutions. *See* Organizations/ institutions
Insurance companies, 132–33, 139
Intellect *('aql),* 80
Intent/intention. *See Niyya*
Interest, unlawful *(riba),* 204–5, 209–11, 215
Interrogation in the Grave, 158
Investments: ethics and, 202–3, 207–8. *See also* Business
Isa (Jesus), virgin conception of, 118, 119
Isha' (evening prayer), 8
Islam: act of accepting, 5; emphasis on marriage, 90–91; Five Pillars, 5; historical perspective, 26–27; meaning of, 1, 4; as system of order, 219 n.41; views of body, soul, and spirit, 128 n.1, 157, 159; as way of life, 1, 32
Islam (submission), 138, 188–89
Islami Bank Bangladesh, 202
Islamic banking, 202, 210–11, 219 n.43
Islamic Funeral Handbook, 171 n.23
Islamic law: financial maintenance of families, 85; jurisprudence *(fiqh),* 58, 204–9, 212–15; marriage contract, 60–66, 81–82; polygyny in, 69–70, 89–90; sources of law, 57, 203–9, 217 n.20. *See also Shari'a*
Islamic medicine: physician/ philosopher *(hakim),* 125; views of body, soul, and spirit, 128 n.1
Islamic schools of law. *See* Legal schools; Muslim Family Law
Isma'il, 74 n.2
Isma'il ibn Nujayd, 191–92
Ismaili Shiites: monogamy, 71; Nizari Ismaili Shi'ism, 72–73, 74 n.2; temporary marriage *(mut'a),* 66
Istihsan (juridical preference), 204–5, 212–13
Istikhara (decision making prayer), 19–20
Istislah (public welfare), 204, 205
Ithar (generosity), 140, 142

Jacob, 137
Ja'fari school of law, guardianship *(wilaya),* 65
Ja'far al-Sadiq (imam), 74 n.2
Jahiliyya ("Time of Ignorance"). *See* Pre-Islamic period
Jalsas (gatherings of singers), 40
Jawad (generosity), 141
Jesus (Isa), virgin conception of, 118, 119
Jews, as marriage partners, 61
Jihad (struggle; social justice): absolution from, 95, 103; Arabic root, 1, 217 n.19; in Muslim public life, 22–23
John the Baptist (Yahya), 98, 101, 117
Jordan: endowment *(waqf),* 202; marriage contracts, 69
Joseph, 114
Jud (generosity), 140, 141
Judgment Day, 158, 161, 163, 171 n.19, 178
Al-Junayd, Abu al-Qasim, 137, 182
Juridical preference *(istihsan),* 204–5, 212–13
Jurisprudence *(fiqh):* contract law, 212–15; schools of Islamic law, 58; sources of law, 204–9
Jurists: consensus of for commercial law, 204–6; consultation among *(shura),* 206; on divorce in a *mut'a* marriage, 67; errors of, 216; as

shalish leaders, 45; sources of law, 57, 204–9; *Sunna* and, 57
Juyubihinna (breasts), covering of, 13

Kamali, Mohammad Hashim, 200, 217 n.8
Karim (Aga Khan), 74 n.2
Khadija, 206
Khan, Muhammad Siddiq, 108
Khumurihinna (veils), 13
Kin: filial loyalty, 88–89; marriage to, 63; responsibility to, 20. *See also* Families
Kindness. *See* Respect
Kitab al-Ri'aya (Muhasibi), 100

Law(s), Islamic. *See* Islamic law; *Shari'a*
Layali (nights), 117–18
Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Power), 118
Lebanese Muslims, 70
Legal opinion *(fatwa):* Bangladesh legal system, 45–46; in contemporary law, 215–16
Legal schools, 58, 208
Legal systems, Bangladesh, 45–46. *See also* Islamic law; *Shari'a*
Lesbianism, 59
Li'an divorce, 64
Liberation Day (Bangladesh), 41
Lineage, right to, 85
Liquor, sale of, 199, 207
Loans, 208, 210–11
Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary *(Sidrat al-Muntaha),* 158, 170 n.11

Maghrib (sunset prayer), 8, 18
Mahall (personal status), 61
Mahfuz ibn Mahmud, 191
Mahr/mohr (dowry), 41, 48, 49, 65–66, 84
Makruh (discouraged) actions, 207
Malik ibn Anas, 100, 210–11
Maliki school of law: guardianship *(wilaya),* 64–65, 69; marriage contract, 60–61
Mandub (recommended) actions, 100, 206
"Man of God," 186–87. *See also* Saint-exemplars
Marfati singers, 40
Marriage: annulments, 64; contemporary practices, 68–70, 82; as contract, 58, 60, 81–82; contract elements, 60–66; divorce (*See* Divorce); dowry *(mahr/mohr),* 41, 48, 49, 65–66, 84; forbidden marriages, 62–64, 68; guardianship *(wilaya),* 60, 64–65; marital roles, 21–22, 47–49, 52–53, 81–86; motherhood and, 87–88, 107; Muhammad on, 107; as peaceful abode, 82–83; polygyny, 41, 54 n.18, 62, 69, 89–90; pre-Islamic period, 81–82; Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 41–42, 47, 49, 52–53; Qur'an on, 58–59; rights and responsibilities, 84–87; selection of spouses, 21, 41, 61–62, 68, 70; spiritual significance, 78, 80, 82–83, 90–92; temporary marriage *(mut'a),* 61, 66–68; terminology, 59–60; witnesses to marriage contract *(shahid),* 65
Martyrs: death during childbirth, 108–9, 111 n.8, 180; death during disasters, 178; murdered persons, 153, 169 n.1
Mary, 137
Maryam, 116–19, 120; Sura of, 114
"Mary's Fist," 121–22
Masjid (mosque), physical space and functions, 25–26
Maskan (home), 83
Masturbation, 59
Matbars (village elders), 45
Materialism, 92
Material world, *vs.* Hereafter, 160, 170 n.15
Meats: forbidden foods, 15, 17; permissible foods, 16, 17; slaughtering methods, 15–16
Mecca, pilgrimage to. *See Hajj*
Media: coverage of local Muslim affairs, 30; influence on daily life, 3–4
Medical care: personal account, 130–

33; physician/philosopher *(hakim),* 125; views of body, soul, and spirit, 128 n.1
Melas (fairs), 41
Men: burial shrouds, 164; dress requirements, 10–11, 14–15; marital rights, 85–87; marital roles, 21, 47–48, 49, 52–53, 81–86
Menstrual periods, Bangladeshi women, 44–45
Mentors, saint-exemplars as, 183–87
Mercy *(rahma):* link to motherhood, 87; toward parents, 100
Messenger(s): Muhammad as, 1, 5; obedience to, 23, 32
Microcredit organizations: ethical investing, 202; Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 40
Mihrab (place of struggle or battle), 117
"Milk" relatives, 63, 86
Miswak (toothbrushes), 10
Mizan ("The Balance"), 161
Modesty in dress, principle of, 10–15
Mohr (dowry). *See Mahr/mohr* (dowry)
Money: borrowed funds, 208, 210–11; donating during Ramadan, 18. *See also* Business; Charity; Economic issues
Monogamy. *See* Marriage; Polygyny
Morality. *See* Ethical conduct
Moral restraint, 81
Mormons, 74
Morning prayer *(fajr),* 7, 8
Morocco, 69
Mosque. *See Masjid*
Motherhood, 87–88, 107–10
Mother Language Day (Bangladesh), 41
Mothers: preferential treatment of, 93, 95, 100, 107, 110; responsibility to, 20. *See also* Parents
"Mothers of the Believers," 90
Mubah (permitted) actions, 100, 207. *See also Halal*
Muftis: qualifications of, 209; as *shalish* leaders, 45
Muhajirin, 111 n.10
Muhammad: on celibacy, 59; on childrearing, 109, 110; on death, 155, 177; death shroud of, 166; on equal treatment of children, 110, 111 n.20; on fasting, 18; filial loyalty, 88; fixed prayer times, 8; as foremost example of Islam, 184; household chores, assistance with, 86; on intention, 4; on marriage, 107; as a merchant, 197, 206; on mothers, treatment of, 93; personal hygiene, 9–10; polygyny of, 90; praise for Allah, 113–14; principles of dress, 10; on public life, 23; religious tolerance, 27; in the *Shahada,* 5; teachings about prayer, 8, 19, 20; on time, use of, 18; on treatment of women, 92; on washing of bodies, 166; wives of, 11, 13, 90, 206; on women's roles, 91; on women, treatment of, 82, 92
Muhasibi, 100
Mujahid, 109
Mu'min (soul of the believer), 157
Munkir (Interrogating Angel), 160
Muqatil ibn Hayyan. *See* Ibn Hayyan, Muqatil
Murders, 153, 154–55, 169 n.1
Muslim (one who submits), 138, 146 n.17
Muslim daily life: day's end activities, 31–32; decision making, 19–20; desire to perform *Hajj,* 27–28; dress, principles of, 10–15; economic relations, 24–25; fasting, 18; foods, 15–17; God-consciousness, 2–5; hygiene, 9–10; marital roles (*See* Marriage); mosques and meeting places, 25–26; Muslims as citizens of nations, 26–27, 28–30; obligatory prayers, 6–8; public life, 22–23; relationship to the environment, 30–31; responsibilities to family, 20–21; time, use of, 18–19; voluntary prayers, 8. *See also Salat*
Muslim Family Law, 57–58, 68–70, 71

Muslims: characteristics of, 4; definition, 1; demographic trends, 26; effects of world events on, 28–29; environment, relationship to, 30–31; as minority citizens, 4, 26, 27; pleasing God as ultimate goal, 81; portrayal as "anti-Western," 29; in the United States, 27, 29, 30, 169; Western attitudes toward, 29–30

Nafs (soul), 80, 92 n.1, 183, 190
Nakir (Interrogating Angel), 160
Names and lineage, importance of, 85, 89
Narrators of hadiths, 203
Nawawi: on nonbelievers, 102; on treatment of parents, 93, 98
Needy persons. *See* Charity
Neighbors, treatment of, 23
News media, influence on daily life, 3–4
Nifaq (hypocrisy), 138
Nikah (sexual intercourse), 59–60
Niqab (veil), 11–12
Nisab (required level of wealth for *Zakat*), 24–25, 200
Niyya (intention): allocating time, 4; Prophet Muhammad on, 4
Nizari Ismaili Shi'ism, 74 n.2; education of children, 72–73
Noah, 60, 79
Nonbelievers, parents as, 97, 102
Non-decision making, 51–52
Non-Muslims: marriage to, 61, 68; parents as, 97, 102; polygyny, views of, 89–90. *See also* Nonbeliever(s)
Nursing. *See* Breastfeeding/nursing

Obedience: of children, 110; to parents, 20, 100, 101
Observance of the Rights Due to God (Muhasibi), 100
Observances and festivals, 40–41. *See also* Rituals
Old age, treatment of parents, 97–101
Oneness of God. *See Tawhid*
"The Opening" *(al-Fatiha),* 7, 167–68
Organizations/institutions, relationship of beliefs to, 130, 143–44
Orphans, 20–21, 85

Pahela Baishakh (Bengali new year), 41
Pain, 137–38, 145 n.13, 149–50
Pairs *(zawjayn),* duality principle, 60, 78–80
Panja-e Maryam, 121–22
Parda/purdah (hiding one's face), 43–44, 50. *See also* Veils and head coverings
Parents: financial responsibility to, 95–96; motherhood, 87–88, 107–110; nonbelievers as, 97, 102; obedience to, 20, 100, 101; respect for beyond death, 102–3; treatment of, 20, 93–95, 97–101, 103, 107
"Patients' Bill of Rights," 132
Peace and tranquility *(sakina),* 83
Pen *(qalam)* and Tablet *(lawhin)* symbols, 80
"People of the Book," as marriage partners, 61, 68
"The Perfect Page of the Prayer-Carpet" ('Ali Zayn), 127
Permitted *(halal; mubah),* 9, 16–17, 100, 207
Personal property. *See* Property
Personal status *(mahall),* 61
Personal Status Codes, 69
Pilgrimage *(Hajj),* 27–28, 103
Pillars of Islam. *See* Five Pillars of Islam
Politics/political thought, Bangladesh, 40, 50
Polygyny (polygamy): in Bangladesh, 41, 54 n.18; Egyptian example, 77–78, 89; of Muhammad, 90; personal account, 71–74; Qur'anic interpretation, 62, 90; in Tunisia, 69
Polytheists, 68; parents as, 97, 102
Possession of property. *See* Property
Power *(khamata):* definitions and theories, 51–52; exclusionary power, 51–52; perceptions of, 35, 47–48, 50

Prayer. *See Salat*
Prayer rugs, 25
Pregnancy, 107, 108; personal accounts, 113–22, 130–31; during Ramadan, 18
Pre-Islamic period, 81–82
Promiscuity, 58
Property: concept of, 24, 216–17 n.7; inheritance rules, 43, 48; Qur'an on, 214; under *Shari'a,* 199, 209, 214, 220 n.66; and status, Bangladesh, 48
Prophets. *See* Muhammad; *specific prophets*
Prostitution, 58
Public life, 22–23
Public welfare *(istislah),* 204, 205
Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 37, 38, 40–41; gender roles, 35–37, 46–50; inheritance rules, 43, 48; marriage and divorce, 41–43, 47, 49; *parda,* 43–44, 50; purity and pollution, 44–45; *shalish,* 45–46, 48. *See also* Bangladesh
Purdah. See Parda/purdah
Purity and pollution, 44–45
Purusha and *Prakriti* symbols, 79

Qadr, Sura of, 118
Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf, 214
Al-Qassar, Hamdun, 186
Qatada, 108, 109
Qiyas (inductive reasoning), 205, 211
Qualitative research, 38
Qur'an: *al-Fatiha* ("The Opening"), 7, 167–68; angelic guidance, 117–18; Angel of Death, 157; on apocalypse, 177; attitudes that lessen pain and suffering, 138–39; *ayat al-ahkam* (verses of legal rulings), 203; ban on interest *(riba),* 209–10; on bartering, 141; *Barzakh* (interval; isthmus), 158; as basis of religious knowledge, 184; body washing, recitation during, 165, 166, 170 n.22; on childrearing, 109, 110; on children's rights, 59; on contracts, 212; on death, 159, 177; death, recitation during, 174, 175; duality concept in, 79–80; on earnings, 22; family law and, 58; forbidden and permissible foods, 15–16; forbidden marriages, 62–63; funerals, recitation following, 168; hearing of death, recitation on, 155; on human weaknesses, 135–36; on *jihad,* 23; on Judgment Day, 161, 163, 171 n.19; jurists, errors of, 216; on justice, 140; on marriage and sexuality, 58–59, 83, 91–92; on Maryam, 116–17; modesty of dress, 13, 14; on motherhood, 87, 107–8; on Muhammad, 184; parents, treatment of, 93, 94, 97–98, 102; Pen *(qalam)* and Tablet *(lawhin),* 80; on polygyny, 62, 90; on possession of property, 214; on purpose of life, 32; Ramadan, recitation during, 18; refugees from Mecca, 142–43; on religious tolerance, 27; on responsibility toward the environment, 30–31; on servanthood, 188; as source of commercial law, 203; spouses, treatment of, 83, 84, 86; "the Heavens and the Earth" *(al-samawat wa al-ard),* 79; travel, supplication for, 33 n.10; on trials of humanity, 136, 138; on virgin conception, 118, 119; on wine and gambling, 17; "womb bonds" *(silat al-rahm),* 88; women's status, 82; on *Zakat,* 24–25. *See also* Sura(s)
Qur'anic verses, in *Zalal al-fuqara* (Sulami), 189–90
Qurtubi: on charity, 96; on motherhood, 108; on parents, treatment of, 94–95, 97, 98–99, 100
Al-Qushayri, Abu al-Qasim, 140–42

Rabah, 'Ata'llah' ibn Abi, 98
Rabbani, Golam (justice), 45–46
Rabi'a bint Ka'b, 138
Rahma (mercy): link to motherhood, 87; toward parents, 100
Al-Rahman (Divine Mercy), 30–31, 87

Rahman, Fazlur, 62
Rak'a (cycle of recitation), 7
Ramadan: fasting *(sawm),* 18; Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 40
Rape, 44
Rauf, Muhammad Abdul, 173–78
Recommended *(mandub)* actions, 100, 206
Refugees from Mecca, 142–43
Relationships: importance of in daily life, 5. *See also* Families; Marriage
Relatives: filial loyalty, 88–89; marriage to, 63, 68; responsibility to, 20. *See also* Families
Religion *(din):* conflict with science, 2; as cultural system, 53; move toward secularization, 2, 32; perceptions of, 136–37
Religious tolerance, 27
Removal of hardship *(taysir),* 198, 204
Repudiation *(zihar),* 64
Respect, toward parents, 20, 93–95, 97–101
Riba (unlawful interest), 204–5, 209–11, 215
Rights: of Allah, 94; of children, 59; of contracting parties, 212; equal rights, Bangladesh government initiatives, 36; marital rights, 84–87; of parents, 94
Right side *vs.* left side of body, hygiene considerations, 10
Rituals: ablutions, 6–7, 8, 165; preparation of bodies for burial, 163–67. *See also Hajj; Salat; Sawm; Shahada; Zakat*
Robes, in Western culture, 11
Rudeness, to parents, 97–98, 101
Ruh/ruhaniyyat (spirit; soul). *See* Soul *(ruh)*
Ruku' (bowing), 7
Rumi, Jalal al-Din, 137–38
Rumi, Mawlana Jalaluddin, 118
Ruwaym, 191

Al-Sa'a ("The Hour"), 158–59, 178
Sabeans, as marriage partners, 61
Sadaq (dowry), 65–66
Sadaqa (voluntary charity), 24, 95–96, 201
Saint-exemplars as teachers, 183–87
Saints and Virtues (Hawley), 193
Sajda (kneeling), 7
Sakha' (generosity), 140–41
Sakina (peace and tranquility), 83
Salat (prayer): *adhan* (call to prayer), 6, 7; *al-Salat al-Jumu'a* (Friday prayers), 25; bedtime, 31–32; blessings during meals, 15; *du'a* for parents, 108; fixed prayer times, 8; *istikhara* (decision making prayer), 19–20; for leaving the house, 23; obligatory, 6–8; prayer charts, 6; *salat al-janaza* (funeral prayer), 167–68; for travel, 33 n.10; voluntary, 8
Sana'i, Hakim, 138–39, 140, 144
Saudi Arabia: family law system, 69; head covering requirement, 14; television, opposition to, 199
Sawm (Ramadan fast), 18. *See also* Ramadan
Sayyidatuna Hawa. *See Hawa* (Eve)
Scholars. *See Ulama*
Schools of law. *See* Legal schools
Second Pillar of Islam. *See* Prayer
Secularism, 2–3, 32, 209
Self-mutilation, 9
Senility, 98
Servanthood, 188
Seven Heavens, 158, 170 n.8
Sexuality: divine aspect of, 80–81; illicit sex, 44, 58, 59; pre-Islamic period, 82; Qur'an on, 58–59; right to sexual satisfaction, 85
Shab-i-Barat (fifteenth night of Sha'ban), 40
Shab-i-Qadar (twenty-seventh night of Ramadan), 40
Shafi'i school of law: guardianship *(wilaya),* 64–65; marriage contract, 60–61, 69; polygyny, 69
Shahada (Testimony of Faith), 5; invocation when dying, 124, 156; recitation of, 61, 168

Shah, Sir Sultan Mohammed (Aga Khan III), 71
Shalish (village council), Purbadhala, Bangladesh, 45–46, 48, 52
Shaqiq ibn Wa'il, 97
Shari'a: application to commerce, 203, 209–15; divorce, 42; inheritance rules, 43; *mahr* (dowry), 66; marital law and, 70; purposes and objectives, 198–200. *See also* Islamic law
"She-Mule of the Graveyard," 162–63
Shiite Islam: "enemy of the Household of the Prophet," 74 n.1; guardianship *(wilaya),* 65; marriage contract, 60–61, 65; polygyny, 69; temporary marriage *(mut'a),* 61, 66–68; witnesses to marriage contract *(shahid),* 65
Shirk (idolatry), 138, 146 n.18
Shrouds, burial, 164, 166–67
Siblings, responsibility to, 20
Sidrat al-Muntaha' (Lote Tree of the Furthest Boundary), 158, 170 n.11
Sigha (marriage formula), 61
Sin: Hell and, 158, 161, 170 nn.12–13; punishment for, 160–61; Qur'an on, 6; rudeness to parents as, 98, 101
Siwak (toothbrushes), 10
Slaughtering rites, 15–16
Sleep, 157, 170 n.7
Smoking, 17
Social justice. *See Jihad*
Social positions, married women, 22, 49–50
Soul *(nafs),* 80, 92 n.1, 183, 190
Soul *(ruh):* ascent of after death, 157–59, 170 n.8; ethical conduct and, 182–83; medicine and, 128 n.1; of unbelievers *(kafir),* 157, 158, 170 nn.12–13
"Speak, but spin" *(hadith u maghzil),* 162, 171 n.21
Speech: cursing of elderly parents, 97, 98, 99; kindness of to parents, 20, 94
Spirit *(ruh). See* Soul *(ruh)*
Spiritual poverty *(faqr),* 188–93
Spiritual pretentiousness, 191
Spiritual transformation, 183, 186, 193
Stations of the Righteous (Sulami), 184–86
Stewardship, 30–31, 200–1, 209
The Stumbling of the Poor (Sulami), 187–94
Submission: *islam,* 138, 188–89; wing of, 94, 97, 100
Substance abuse, 9, 17
As-Suddi, 96
Sufficiency, in marriage, 61–62, 65, 69, 70
Sufism: *adab* (ethical comportment), 182, 185–86, 194–95 n.14; definitions of, 182, 193; literature, 129–30; spirit/soul and, 182–83; Sulami, teachings of, 187–94
Suhur (meal), 18
Suicide, 6, 154, 155
Sujud (kneeling), 7
Al-Sulami, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman, 184–85, 187–94
Sultana, Najman Ara (justice), 45–46
Suluk al-'arifin (Sulami), 193
Sunna (Way of the Prophet): as basis of religious knowledge, 184; family law and, 57; *maqbul* (accepted) and *mardud* (rejected), 203; as source of commercial law, 203; text of in *Zalal al-fuqara* (Sulami), 189–90; on *Zakat,* 24–25
Sunni Islam: "enemy of the Houshold of the Prophet," 74 n.1; guardianship *(wilaya),* 64–65, 70; marriage contract, 60–63, 65, 88; temporary marriage *(mut'a),* 67, 68; witnesses to marriage contract *(shahid),* 65
Sunset prayer *(maghrib),* 8, 18
Sura(s): of Maryam, 114; of *Qadr* (Divine Power), 118; of Ya Sin, 115, 174, 175; of Yosuf, 114
Surat al-Fatiha ("The Opening"), 7, 167–68

Surat al-Infitar ("The Cleaving Asunder"), 177–78
Surat al-Nisa', forbidden marriages, 62–63
Surat al-Rahman ("The All-Merciful"), 30–31
Swiss Civil Code, 70
Syria, 69

Tabari: on motherhood, 108, 109; parents, treatment of, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100
Tarawih (prayers), 18
Tattoos, 9
Tawhid (oneness of God), 6, 79, 199
Taxes: Alms Tax of Islam *(Zakat),* 24–25, 96, 200–1; attempts to reduce, 201; real estate, 205
Taysir (removal of hardship), 198, 204
Teachers, saint-exemplars as, 183–87
Temporary marriage *(mut'a),* 61, 66–68
Terrorism, supporters of, 201
Theodicy, 134, 145 n.9
The Wayfaring of the Gnostics (Sulami), 193
Third Pillar of Islam. *See Zakat*
"Time of Ignorance. *See* Pre-Islamic period
Time, use of, 18–19
Tobacco use, 17
Toilets, use of, 10
Toothbrushers *(miswak; siwak),* 10
Trade. *See* Business
Transparency in business transactions, 211–12
Travel, supplication for, 33 n.10
Trials of humanity, 135–39
"The Trustworthy" *(Al-Amin),* 197, 206
Tsunami of 2004, 176–78
Tunisia: family law reforms, 69; head coverings, 14
Turkey: civil law, 69–70; head coverings, 14
Twelver Shiites. *See* Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism

"Uff": Abraham use of, 99; cursing of elderly parents, 97, 98, 99
Ulama (scholars): consensus of for commercial law, 204–6; consultation among *(shura),* 206; on mothers, treatment of, 93
'Umar ibn al-Khattab (second caliph): on *mut'a* (temporary) marriage, 68; on nonbelievers, 97
Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs, 74 n.1
Umma (community of Muslims): daily life, 25–26; as minority citizens, 28–30. *See also* Community activities
Unbelief *(kufr),* 138
Unbeliever(s) *(kafir):* definition, 138; souls of, 157, 158, 170 nn.12–13
United States: *Islamic Funeral Handbook,* 171 n.23; Muslims in, 27, 29, 169; public school systems, 30
Unity, doctrine of, 79
'Urf (customary usage), 205

Veils and head coverings, 11–14
Victory Day (Bangladesh), 41
Village councils *(bichar; salish),* 45–46, 48, 52
Virgin conception of Isa (Jesus), 118, 119
Virginity, 44
Virgins, *(mut'a)* temporary marriage to, 67
Voluntary activities: charity *(Sadaqa),* 24, 95–96, 201; fasting, 18; prayers, 8

Wahnan 'ala wahnin (weakness upon weakness), 107–8
Waiting period *('idda):* following divorce, 63–64; following *mut'a* (temporary) marriage, 67; widows, 162
Wakala (agency), in contracts, 213
Waqf (endowment), 202
War and Peace (Tolstoy), 91
War on Terror, 201
Washing: hygiene obligations, 9–10; preparing bodies for burial, 151–53, 163–67; *wudu',* 6–7, 8

Wealth: charity and, 96; as source of power, 51; *Zakat* and, 24–25, 96, 200–1. *See also* Property
Western culture: attitudes toward Muslims, 29–30; robes in, 11; stereotypical views of Muslims, 81
Widows: inheritance, 43, 48; protection of, 59, 82, 90; waiting period, 162
Wilaya (guardianship), 64–65, 69
Wine, prohibition against, 17. *See also* Alcohol drinking
Witnesses to marriage contract *(shahid),* 65
"Womb bonds" *(silat al-rahm),* 88
Womb, sacredness of, 87
Women: Bangladeshi, 35–37, 46–50, 53; breastfeeding, 18, 22, 86, 107, 108; burial shrouds, 164; childrearing, 84–85, 86, 87, 107, 109–10; dress requirements, 11–14; family names, 85, 89; marital roles, 21, 22, 47–49, 53, 81–86; mosque attendance, 25; motherhood, 87–88; negotiation of *mahr* (dowry), 66; rights of, 84–85, 86–87; work and earnings, 22, 50, 70, 85. *See also* Gender roles; Marriage
Worship, obligation to, 6
Wudu' (ablutions), 6–7, 8

Yahya (John the Baptist), 98, 101, 117
Yahya ibn Mu'adh al-Razi, 190
Ya Sin/Yasin, Sura of, 115, 174, 175
Yin and *Yang* symbols, 79
Yosuf, Sura of, 114

Zakariyya, 116–17
Zakat (mandatory charity; Alms Tax of Islam), 24–25, 96, 200–1. *See also Sadaqa*
Zalal al-fuqara (Sulami), 187–94
Zawjayn (pairs), duality principle, 60, 78–80
Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali ibn al-Husayn. *See* 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (imam)
Zihar (repudiation), 64
Zilani, Abdul Quadir *(Bara Pir),* 44, 55 n.30
Zoroastrians, as marriage partners, 61
Zuhr (noon prayer), 8

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Voices of Islam — vii
Vincent J. Cornell

Introduction: Beauty, Culture, and Creativity in Islam — xvii
Vincent J. Cornell

1. Islamic Art — 1
Frithjof Schuon

2. The Foundations of Islamic Art — 5
Titus Burckhardt

3. The Common Language of Islamic Art — 19
Titus Burckhardt

4. The Art and Ambience of Islamic Dress — 27
Frithjof Schuon

5. The Question of Images — 29
Titus Burckhardt

6. The Art of Qur'an Calligraphy — 33
Martin Lings

7. The Art of Qur'an Illumination — 39
Martin Lings

8. Art and Liturgy — 49
Titus Burckhardt

9. Music and Spirituality in Islam — 59
Jean-Louis Michon

10. Regaining the Center: Gardens and Thresholds — 89
Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

11. The Islamic Garden: History, Symbolism, and the Qur'an — 93
Emma C. Clark

12. The Qur'anic Symbolism of Water — 111
Martin Lings

13. Islamic Literatures: Writing in the Shade of the Qur'an — 121
Shawkat M. Toorawa

14. Moths and Scattered Flames: Some Thoughts on Islam and Poetry — 143
Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

15. Medicine and Healing in Traditional Islam — 153
Laleh Bakhtiar

Index — 177

About the Editor and Contributors — 191

Voices of Islam

Vincent J. Cornell

It has long been a truism to say that Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world. However, the situation expressed by this statement is more than a little ironic because Islam is also one of the most studied religions in the world, after Christianity and Judaism. In the quarter of a century since the 1978–1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, hundreds of books on Islam and the Islamic world have appeared in print, including more than a score of introductions to Islam in various European languages. How is one to understand this paradox? Why is it that most Americans and Europeans are still largely uninformed about Islam after so many books about Islam have been published? Even more, how can people still claim to know so little about Islam when Muslims now live in virtually every medium-sized and major community in America and Europe? A visit to a local library or to a national bookstore chain in any American city will reveal numerous titles on Islam and the Muslim world, ranging from journalistic potboilers to academic studies, translations of the Qur'an, and works advocating a variety of points of view from apologetics to predictions of the apocalypse.

The answer to this question is complex, and it would take a book itself to discuss it adequately. More than 28 years have passed since Edward Said wrote his classic study *Orientalism*, and it has been nearly as long since Said critiqued journalistic depictions of Islam in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. When these books first appeared in print, many thought that the ignorance about the Middle East and the Muslim world in the West would finally be dispelled. However, there is little evidence that the public consciousness of Islam and Muslims has been raised to a significant degree in Western countries. Scholars of Islam in American universities still feel the need to humanize Muslims in the eyes of their students. A basic objective of many introductory courses on Islam is to demonstrate that Muslims are rational human beings and that their beliefs are worthy of respect. As Carl W. Ernst observes in the preface to his recent work, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the*

Contemporary World, "It still amazes me that intelligent people can believe that all Muslims are violent or that all Muslim women are oppressed, when they would never dream of uttering slurs stereotyping much smaller groups such as Jews or blacks. The strength of these negative images of Muslims is remarkable, even though they are not based on personal experience or actual study, but they receive daily reinforcement from the news media and popular culture."[1]

Such prejudices and misconceptions have only become worse since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. There still remains a need to portray Muslims in all of their human diversity, whether this diversity is based on culture, historical circumstances, economic class, gender, or religious doctrine. Today, Muslims represent nearly one-fourth of the world's population. Although many Americans are aware that Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, most are surprised to learn that half of the Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan. In this sense, Islam is as much an "Asian" religion as is Hinduism or Buddhism. The new reality of global Islam strongly contradicts the "Middle Eastern" view of Islam held by most Americans. Politically, the United States has been preoccupied with the Middle East for more than half a century. Religiously, however, American Protestantism has been involved in the Middle East for more than 150 years. Thus, it comes as a shock for Americans to learn that only one-fourth of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa and that only one-fifth of Muslims are Arabs. Islam is now as much a worldwide religion as Christianity, with somewhere between 4 and 6 million believers in the United States and approximately 10 million believers in Western Europe. Almost 20 million Muslims live within the borders of the Russian Federation, and nearly a million people of Muslim descent live in the Russian city of St. Petersburg, on the Gulf of Finland.

To think of Islam as monolithic under these circumstances is both wrong and dangerous. The idea that all Muslims are fundamentalists or antidemocratic religious zealots can lead to the fear that dangerous aliens are hiding within Western countries, a fifth column of a civilization that is antithetical to freedom and the liberal way of life. This attitude is often expressed in popular opinion in both the United States and Europe. For example, it can be seen in the "Letters" section of the June 7, 2004, edition of *Time* magazine, where a reader writes: "Now it is time for Muslim clerics to denounce the terrorists or admit that Islam is fighting a war with us—a religious war."[2] For the author of this letter, Muslim "clerics" are not to be trusted, not because they find it hard to believe that pious Muslims would commit outrageous acts of terrorism, but because they secretly hate the West and its values. Clearly, for this reader of *Time,* Islam and the West are at war; however the "West" may be defined and wherever "Islam" or Muslims are to be found.

Prejudice against Muslim minorities still exists in many countries. In Russia, Muslim restaurateurs from the Caucasus Mountains must call themselves "Georgian" to stay in business. In China, being Muslim by ethnicity is acceptable, but being a Muslim by conviction might get one convicted for antistate activities. In the Balkans, Muslims in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia are called "Turks" and right-wing nationalist parties deny them full ethnic legitimacy as citizens of their countries. In India, over a thousand Muslims were killed in communal riots in Gujarat as recently as 2002. As I write these words, Israel and Hizbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political movement and militia, are engaged in a bloody conflict that has left hundreds of dead and injured on both sides. Although the number of people who have been killed in Lebanon, most of whom are Shiite civilians, is far greater than the number of those killed in Israel, television news reports in the United States do not treat Lebanese and Israeli casualties the same way. While the casualties that are caused by Hizbollah rockets in Israel are depicted as personal tragedies, Lebanese casualties are seldom personalized in this way. The truth is, of course, that all casualties of war are personal tragedies, whether the victims are Lebanese civilians, Israeli civilians, or American soldiers killed or maimed by improvised explosive devices in Iraq. In addition, all civilian deaths in war pose a moral problem, whether they are caused as a consequence of aggression or of retaliation. In many ways, depersonalization can have worse effects than actual hatred. An enemy that is hated must at least be confronted; when innocent victims are reduced to pictures without stories, they are all too easily ignored.

The problem of depersonalization has deeper roots than just individual prejudice. Ironically, the global village created by international news organizations such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News may unintentionally contribute to the problem of devaluing Muslim lives. Depictions of victimhood are often studies in incomprehension: victims speak a language the viewer cannot understand, their shock or rage strips them of their rationality, and their standard of living and mode of dress may appear medieval or even primitive when compared with the dominant cultural forms of modernity. In her classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt pointed out that the ideology of human equality, which is fostered with all good intentions by the international news media, paradoxically contributes to the visibility of difference by confusing equality with sameness. In 99 out of 100 cases, says Arendt, equality "will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is 'normal' if he is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he happens to be different. This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous."[3] According to Arendt, the widespread acceptance of the ideal of social equality after the French Revolution was a major reason why genocide,

whether of Jews in Europe, Tutsis in Rwanda, or Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, has become a characteristically modern phenomenon.

The idea of equality as sameness was not as firmly established in the United States, claimed Arendt, because the ''equal opportunity'' ideology of American liberalism values difference—in the form of imagination, entrepreneurship, and personal initiative—as a token of success.[4] This ideology enabled Jews in America to assert their distinctiveness and eventually to prosper in the twentieth century, and it provides an opportunity for Muslim Americans to assert their distinctiveness and to prosper today. So far, the United States has not engaged in systematic persecution of Muslims and has been relatively free of anti-Muslim prejudice. However, fear and distrust of Muslims among the general public is fostered by images of insurgent attacks and suicide bombings in Iraq, of Al Qaeda atrocities around the globe, and of increasing expressions of anti-Americanism in the Arabic and Islamic media. In addition, some pundits on talk radio, certain fundamentalist religious leaders, and some members of the conservative press and academia fan the flames of prejudice by portraying Islam as inherently intolerant and by portraying Muslims as slaves to tradition and authoritarianism rather than as advocates of reason and freedom of expression. Clearly, there is still a need to demonstrate to the American public that Muslims are rational human beings and that Islam is a religion that is worthy of respect.

Changing public opinion about Islam and Muslims in the United States and Europe will not be easy. The culture critic Guillermo Gomez-Peña has written that as a result of the opening of American borders to non-Europeans in the 1960s, the American myth of the cultural melting pot ''has been replaced by a model that is more germane to the times, that of the *menudo chowder*. According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float.''[5] At the present time, Muslims constitute the most visible ''stubborn chunks'' in the *menudo chowder* of American and European pluralism. Muslims are often seen as the chunks of the *menudo chowder* that most stubbornly refuse to ''melt in.'' To the non-Muslim majoritarian citizen of Western countries, Muslims seem to be the most ''uncivil'' members of civil society. They do not dress like the majority, they do not eat like the majority, they do not drink like the majority, they do not let their women work, they reject the music and cultural values of the majority, and sometimes they even try to opt out of majoritarian legal and economic systems. In Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that left-wing pundits most love to hate. Americans, however, have been more ambivalent about Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, there have been sincere attempts to include Muslims as full partners in civil society. On the other hand, the apparent resistance of some Muslims to ''fit in'' creates a widespread distrust that has had legal ramifications in several notable cases.

A useful way to conceive of the problem that Muslims face as members of civil society—both within Western countries and in the global civil society that is dominated by the West—is to recognize, following Homi K. Bhabha, the social fact of Muslim *unhomeliness*. To be "unhomed," says Bhabha, is not to be homeless, but rather to escape easy assimilation or accommodation.[6] The problem is not that the "unhomed" possesses no physical home but that there is no "place" to locate the unhomed in the majoritarian consciousness. Simply put, one does not know what to make of the unhomed. Bhabha derives this term from Sigmund Freud's concept of *unheimlich,* "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."[7] Unhomeliness is a way of expressing social discomfort. When one encounters the unhomed, one feels awkward and uncomfortable because the unhomed person appears truly alien. Indeed, if there is any single experience that virtually all Muslims in Western countries share, it is that Islam makes non-Muslims uncomfortable. In the global civil society dominated by the West, Muslims are unhomed wherever they may live, even in their own countries.

This reality of Muslim experience highlights how contemporary advocates of Muslim identity politics have often made matters worse by accentuating symbolic tokens of difference between so-called Islamic and Western norms. The problem for Islam in today's global civil society is not that it is not seen. On the contrary, Islam and Muslims are arguably all too visible because they are seen as fundamentally different from the accepted norm. Like the black man in the colonial West Indies or in Jim Crow America, the Muslim is, to borrow a phrase from Frantz Fanon, "overdetermined from without."[8] Muslims have been overdetermined by the press, overdetermined by Hollywood, overdetermined by politicians, and overdetermined by culture critics. From the president of the United States to the prime minister of the United Kingdom, and in countless editorials in print and television media, leaders of public opinion ask, "What do Muslims want?" Such a question forces the Muslim into a corner in which the only answer is apologetics or defiance. To again paraphrase Fanon, the overdetermined Muslim is constantly made aware of himself or herself not just in the third person but in *triple person*. As a symbol of the unhomely, the Muslim is made to feel personally responsible for a contradictory variety of "Islamic" moral values, "Islamic" cultural expressions, and "Islamic" religious and political doctrines.[9]

In the face of such outside pressures, what the overdetermined Muslim needs most is not to be seen, but to be heard. There is a critical need for Islam to be expressed to the world not as an image, but as a narrative, and for Muslims to bear their own witness to their own experiences. The vast majority of books on Islam written in European languages, even the best ones, have been written by non-Muslims. This is not necessarily a problem, because an objective and open-minded non-Muslim can often describe Islam for a non-

Muslim audience better than a Muslim apologist. The scholars Said and Ernst, mentioned above, are both from Christian backgrounds. The discipline of Religious Studies from which Ernst writes has been careful to maintain a nonjudgmental attitude toward non-Christian religions. As heirs to the political and philosophical values of European liberalism, scholars of Religious Studies are typically dogmatic about only one thing: they must practice *epoché* (a Greek word meaning "holding back" or restraining one's beliefs) when approaching the worldview of another religion. In the words of the late Canadian scholar of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, it is not enough to act like "a fly crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl," magisterially observing another's religious practices while remaining distant from the subject. Instead, one must be more engaged in her inquiry and, through imagination and the use of *epoché,* try to find out what it feels like to be a goldfish.[10]

Through the practice of *epoché,* the field of Religious Studies has by now produced two generations of accomplished scholars of Islam in the United States and Canada. Smith himself was a fair and sympathetic Christian scholar of Islam, and his field has been more influential than any other in promoting the study of Islam in the West. However, even Smith was aware that only a goldfish truly knows what it means to be a goldfish. The most that a sympathetic non-Muslim specialist in Islamic studies can do is *describe* Islam from the perspective of a sensitive outsider. Because non-Muslims do not share a personal commitment to the Islamic faith, they are not in the best position to convey a sense of what it means to *be* a Muslim on the inside—to live a Muslim life, to share Muslim values and concerns, and to experience Islam spiritually. In the final analysis, only Muslims can fully bear witness to their own traditions from within.

The five-volume set of *Voices of Islam* is an attempt to meet this need. By bringing together the voices of nearly 50 prominent Muslims from around the world, it aims to present an accurate, comprehensive, and accessible account of Islamic doctrines, practices, and worldviews for a general reader at the senior high school and university undergraduate level. The subjects of the volumes—*Voices of Tradition; Voices of the Spirit; Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society; Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science;* and *Voices of Change*—were selected to provide as wide a depiction as possible of Muslim experiences and ways of knowledge. Taken collectively, the chapters in these volumes provide bridges between formal religion and culture, the present and the past, tradition and change, and spiritual and outward action that can be crossed by readers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims, many times and in a variety of ways. What this set does *not* do is present a magisterial, authoritative vision of an "objectively real" Islam that is juxtaposed against a supposedly inauthentic diversity of individual voices. As the Egyptian-American legal scholar and culture critic Khaled Abou El Fadl has pointed out, whenever Islam is the subject of discourse, the authoritative quickly elides into the authoritarian, irrespective of whether the voice of authority is

Muslim or non-Muslim.[11] The editors of *Voices of Islam* seek to avoid the authoritarian by allowing every voice expressed in the five-volume set to be authoritative, both in terms of individual experience and in terms of the commonalities that Muslims share among themselves.

THE EDITORS

The general editor for *Voices of Islam* is Vincent J. Cornell, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was solicited by Praeger, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing, to formulate this project, he was director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Cornell has been a Sunni Muslim for more than 30 years and is a noted scholar of Islamic thought and history. His most important book, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (1998), was described by a prepublication reviewer as ''the most significant study of the Sufi tradition in Islam to have appeared in the last two decades.'' Besides publishing works on Sufism, Dr. Cornell has also written articles on Islamic law, Islamic theology, and moral and political philosophy. For the past five years, he has been a participant in the Archbishop of Canterbury's ''Building Bridges'' dialogue of Christian and Muslim theologians. In cooperation with the Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute, he is presently co-convener of a group of Muslim scholars, of whom some are contributors to *Voices of Islam,* which is working toward a new theology of the religious other in Islam. Besides serving as general editor for *Voices of Islam,* Dr. Cornell is also the volume editor for Volume 1, *Voices of Tradition;* Volume 2, *Voices of the Spirit;* and Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science.*

The associate editors for *Voices of Islam* are Omid Safi and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore. Omid Safi is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Safi, the grandson of a noted Iranian Ayatollah, was born in the United States but raised in Iran and has been recognized as an important Muslim voice for moderation and diversity. He gained widespread praise for his edited first book, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003), and was interviewed on CNN, National Public Radio, and other major media outlets. He recently published an important study of Sufi-state relations in premodern Iran, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006). Dr. Safi is the volume editor for Volume 5, *Voices of Change,* which contains chapters by many of the authors represented in his earlier work, *Progressive Muslims.*

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore has been a practicing Sunni Muslim for almost 40 years. She is director of the interfaith publishing houses Fons Vitae and Quinta Essentia and cofounder and trustee of the Islamic Texts Society of Cambridge, England. Some of the most influential families in Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have supported her publishing projects. She is an accomplished lecturer in art history, world religions, and filmmaking and is a founding member of the Thomas Merton Center Foundation. Henry-Blakemore received her BA at Sarah Lawrence College, studied at the American University in Cairo and Al-Azhar University, earned her MA in Education at the University of Michigan, and served as a research fellow at Cambridge University from 1983 to 1990. She is the volume editor for Volume 3, *Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society.*

THE AUTHORS

As stated earlier, *Voices of Islam* seeks to meet the need for Muslims to bear witness to their own traditions by bringing together a diverse collection of Muslim voices from different regions and from different scholarly and professional backgrounds. The voices that speak to the readers about Islam in this set come from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, and include men and women, academics, community and religious leaders, teachers, activists, and business leaders. Some authors were born Muslims and others embraced Islam at various points in their lives. A variety of doctrinal, legal, and cultural positions are also represented, including modernists, traditionalists, legalists, Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis, and "progressive Muslims." The editors of the set took care to represent as many Muslim points of view as possible, including those that they may disagree with. Although each chapter in the set was designed to provide basic information for the general reader on a particular topic, the authors were encouraged to express their individual voices of opinion and experience whenever possible.

In theoretical terms, *Voices of Islam* treads a fine line between what Paul Veyne has called "specificity" and "singularity." As both an introduction to Islam and as an expression of Islamic diversity, this set combines historical and commentarial approaches, as well as poetic and narrative accounts of individual experiences. Because of the wide range of subjects that are covered, individualized accounts (the "singular") make up much of the narrative of *Voices of Islam,* but the intent of the work is not to express individuality per se. Rather, the goal is to help the reader understand the varieties of Islamic experience (the "specific") more deeply by finding within their specificity a certain kind of generality.[12]

For Veyne, "specificity" is another way of expressing typicality or the ideal type, a sociological concept that has been a useful tool for investigating complex systems of social organization, thought, or belief. However, the problem with typification is that it may lead to oversimplification, and oversimplification is the handmaiden of the stereotype. Typification can lead to oversimplification because the concept of typicality belongs to a structure of general knowledge that obscures the view of the singular and the different. Thus,

presenting the voices of only preselected ''typical Muslims'' or ''representative Muslims'' in a work such as *Voices of Islam* would only aggravate the tendency of many Muslims and non-Muslims to define Islam in a single, essentialized way. When done from without, this can lead to a form of stereotyping that may exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the tendency to see Muslims in ways that they do not see themselves. When done from within, it can lead to a dogmatic fundamentalism (whether liberal or conservative does not matter) that excludes the voices of difference from ''real'' Islam and fosters a totalitarian approach to religion. Such an emphasis on the legitimacy of representation by Muslims themselves would merely reinforce the ideal of sameness that Arendt decried and enable the overdetermination of the ''typical'' Muslim from without. For this reason, *Voices of Islam* seeks to strike a balance between specificity and singularity. Not only the chapters in these volumes but also the backgrounds and personal orientations of their authors express Islam as a lived diversity and as a source of multiple wellsprings of knowledge. Through the use of individual voices, this work seeks to save the ''singular'' from the ''typical'' by employing the ''specific.''

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a major figure in the field of Subaltern Studies, notes: ''Singularity is a matter of viewing. It comes into being as that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category.''[13] For Chakrabarty, the singular is a necessary antidote to the typical because it ''defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination.''[14] Because the tendency to overdetermine and objectify Islam is central to the continued lack of understanding of Islam by non-Muslims, it is necessary to defy the generalizing impulse by demonstrating that the unity of Islam is not a unity of sameness, but of diversity. Highlighting the singularity of individual Islamic practices and doctrines becomes a means of liberating Islam from the totalizing vision of both religious fundamentalism (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) and secular essentialism. While Islam in theory may be a unity, in both thought and practice this ''unity'' is in reality a galaxy whose millions of singular stars exist within a universe of multiple perspectives. This is not just a sociological fact, but a theological point as well. For centuries, Muslim theologians have asserted that the Transcendent Unity of God is a mystery that defies the normal rules of logic. To human beings, unity usually implies either singularity or sameness, but with respect to God, Unity is beyond number or comparison.

In historiographical terms, a work that seeks to describe Islam through the voices of individual Muslims is an example of ''minority history.'' However, by allowing the voices of specificity and singularity to enter into a trialogue that includes each other as well as the reader, *Voices of Islam* is also an example of ''subaltern history.'' For Chakrabarty, subaltern narratives ''are marginalized not because of any conscious intentions but because they represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional

history."[15] Subaltern narratives do not only belong to socially subordinate or minority groups, but they also belong to underrepresented groups in Western scholarship, even if these groups comprise a billion people as Muslims do. Subaltern narratives resist typification because the realities that they represent do not correspond to the stereotypical. As such, they need to be studied on their own terms. The history of Islam in thought and practice is the product of constant dialogues between the present and the past, internal and external discourses, culture and ideology, and tradition and change. To describe Islam as anything less would be to reduce it to a limited set of descriptive and conceptual categories that can only rob Islam of its diversity and its historical and intellectual depth. The best way to retain a sense of this diversity and depth is to allow Muslim voices to relate their own narratives of Islam's past and present.

NOTES

1. Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), xvii.
2. *Time,* June 7, 2004, 10.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* rev. ed. (San Diego, New York, and London: Harvest Harcourt, 1976), 54.
4. Ibid., 55.
5. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The New World (B)order," *Third Text* 21 (Winter 1992–1993): 74, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 313.
6. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 13.
7. Ibid., 14–15.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, U.K.: Pluto, 1986), 116. The original French term for this condition is *surdéterminé*. See idem, *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 128.
9. Ibid., 112.
10. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7.
11. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 9–85.
12. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology,* trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 56.
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 82.
14. Ibid., 83.
15. Ibid., 101.

Introduction: Beauty, Culture, and Creativity in Islam

Vincent J. Cornell

In "Diary of a Careless Woman" (*Yawmiyat Mar'a la Mubaliya*), the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, bemoaning the state of contemporary Arab culture, wrote: "Our culture! Nothing but bubbles in washtubs and chamber pots!"[1] Qabbani's complaint, which shocked readers at the time it was written, reflected what the French Arabist and culture critic Jacques Berque called the "ravaged subjectivity" of the Arab intellectual. "In aesthetic matters as in everything else," wrote Berque, "the Arabs suffer both from the valuation they place upon their classicism, and from their training on foreign models. They attach value to this training itself, since in most cases they take it as an index of modernity and a criterion of survival. Arabic expression is thus caught between two millstones, one coming from the depths of the ages, the other from the outside."[2]

Berque's analysis of the dilemma of Arab cultural expression can be applied to Islamic cultural expression as well. The two millstones of which he speaks —a formalistic classicism that leads to the idealized construction of a mythical past and a shallow and materialistic modernism, imported from the outside, which offers the allure of progress without the antidote of self-criticality— imprison the contemporary Muslim artist and intellectual between two dogmatisms that offer few avenues of escape. In response to this dilemma, the Muslim artist or intellectual often retreats into an antimodern or anti-Western stance in order to preserve the integrity of a classical ideal that is more metaphorical than real. However, what such artists and intellectuals fail to realize is that Muslims and Westerners are both caught in a similar dilemma. Both are born into the "original sin" of modernity, whether they live in Cairo or Cleveland, Tehran or Topeka, Lahore or Los Angeles. Because of this, any attempt to escape from modernity can only be made through modernity itself, by using modern concepts, strategies, and methodologies. Muslim artists and intellectuals make frequent and regular use of

modern concepts and strategies whether they intend to do so or not. This is why the attempt to undo the loss of tradition often becomes a false front, the fetishization of an ideal, and an artificial invention of a pseudo-tradition.

This problem is not unique to the Muslim world. The invention of pseudo-tradition is as much a problem for Western conservatives as it is for Muslim revivalists. For example, speaking empirically, what makes the "Greatest Generation" of Americans who fought in World War II necessarily better than the present generation of Americans? How can one be sure that the present generation of Americans would not respond with the same courage and resolve if faced with the same challenges? Eric Hobsbawm has observed that the nostalgic reinvention of tradition is not a creative revitalization of the past but is instead a sterile process of "formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition."[3] The Moroccan feminist writer Fatima Mernissi refers to the fetishization of tradition in the contemporary Muslim world as a *mal du présent,* a "sickness of the present," which leads Muslims to experience "a desire for death, a desire to be elsewhere, to be absent, to flee to the past as a way of being absent. A suicidal absence."[4]

Characteristic of the nostalgia for the past as described by Hobsbawm and Mernissi is the rejection of values labeled as "modern" by Muslim ideological conservatives. In the context of postcolonial Islam, this means a rejection of virtually everything that bespeaks Western liberalism. The Iranian essayist Abdolkarim Soroush, despite being highly critical of the Islamic Republic of Iran, supports the antiliberal stance of the Iranian Revolution when he writes, "The modern world is the ethical inverse of the old world. The ancient apocalyptic prophecies came true: Reason is enslaved to desire, the external governs the internal, and vices have supplanted the virtues."[5] In his famous manifesto *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Signs along the Road), the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) warns Muslim youth to avoid Western views of "the interpretation of human endeavor...the explanation of the origin of the universe, [and] the origin of the life of man.... It is... not permissible for a Muslim to learn them from anyone other than a God-fearing and pious Muslim, who knows that guidance in these matters comes from God."[6] The reason why Muslims must reject the products of Western culture, says Qutb, is that "these 'civilizations' that have dazzled many Muslims and have defeated their spirits, are nothing but an ignorant and godless system at heart, and this system is erroneous, hollow, and worthless in comparison with Islam.... We ought not to be defeated to such an extent that we start looking for similarities with Islam in current systems and in some current religions, or in some current ideas; we reject these systems in the East as well as in the West. We reject them all, as indeed they are retrogressive and in opposition to the direction in which Islam intends to take humankind."[7]

Such strikingly similar points of view from a conservative Muslim Brotherhood activist and an ostensibly progressive Iranian thinker remind us that the

current confrontation between postcolonial Islam and the West is not only political but also cultural. As we have learned from recent debates in the United States over funding for the Public Broadcasting System and the National Endowment for the Humanities, culture wars are just as often fought over art and philosophy as over political ideologies. Certainly, there is much in Western secular culture that is profane and antireligious, and draws one's attention away from the spiritual and toward the material. But have the jeremiads of modern Muslim revivalists led to anything more culturally significant than a resurgent Islamic political activism? Have new schools of literature, music, or design developed, for example, among the different branches of the Muslim Brotherhood? Has there been a renaissance of Islamic arts, letters, or architecture to counteract the allegedly decadent cultural expressions of the West? In Iran, the Islamic Revolution created new markets for edited works of classical Islamic scholarship and produced a vivid poster art based largely on political themes. In addition, the works of Iranian filmmakers have appeared at Cannes and even in Hollywood. But has the official cultural environment of the Islamic Republic been conducive to an artistic and intellectual renaissance in general? The jury is still out on these questions, but most observers would probably respond in the negative. Creativity in today's Islam is more a product of the margins than of the center.

The Egyptian-American legal scholar and culture critic Khaled M. Abou El Fadl has noted that all too often, the image of Islamic culture among non-Muslims is associated not with beauty, but with everything ugly, unpleasant, and inhumane. "In these popular perceptions, Islam is a legalistic religion whose numerous laws vitiate the need for morality or ethics or for a sense of beauty. The encounter is rendered frustrating when a Muslim jumps up in the midst of a discussion and declares, 'Beauty is a corruption, and that is why there is no law in Shari'a which commands that we should care for beauty'."[8] If the image of contemporary Islam that Abou El Fadl describes is accurate, then the attempt by conservative Islamic ideologues to separate Islam retroactively from the spiritually corrosive effects of globalization and Westernization seems analogous to a doctor's attempt to amputate a gangrenous limb after the gangrene has already entered the bloodstream.

Virtually every Muslim in the world knows the saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "God is beautiful and He loves beauty" (*Allahu jamil wa yuhibbu al-jamal*). If this is the case, then where is the sense of beauty in contemporary Islam? Where is the sense of the spiritual aesthetics of form, substance, and expression that used to be characteristic of the arts of the Muslim world? While examples of beauty can still be found in modern Islam, it often appears, as Abou El Fadl suggests, that ugliness is taking over. First-time visitors to the Middle East often remark on the stark contrast between the elegance and majesty of premodern Islamic mosques and their ungainly modern counterparts, which are often lit garishly at night by green neon lights. Traditionally, mosques on the island of Java in Indonesia were built

without minarets, following South Indian architectural models. In the twentieth century, Indonesian Muslim reformers, returning from the Middle East, sought to correct this "problem" by attaching new minarets to preexisting structures. In the Javanese city of Demak, there is a mosque dating to the fifteenth century CE, which the locals believe was constructed by the *Wali Songo,* the nine saints who first brought Islam to Java. This old mosque, which is topped by a low-slung tiled roof that shades the prayer hall and outer portico, is a place of peace and contemplation that evokes an immediate sense of spirituality. However, due to the zeal of modern reformers, a steel minaret that looks like an oil derrick now stands next to the mosque and utterly ruins the visual effect of the original building. In 2005 I visited Bosnia-Herzegovina as a member of an interreligious delegation headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Outside the city of Mostar, we saw a mosque under construction, endowed by donors from abroad, whose squat onion dome and arched portico made it look more like a crouching spider than a place of spiritual retreat and contemplation. A British Muslim scholar in the delegation wryly observed that it must have been a present to Bosnia-Herzegovina from the Klingon Empire of the *Star Trek* television series.

In an ironic correspondence that deserves its own separate analysis, the word that best describes the attitude of modern ideological Islam toward beauty and art is "Philistine." The dictionary definition of a Philistine is a materialistic person who is indifferent to or disapproving of artistic and intellectual achievements and values. In the city of Cairo, Egypt, there is a museum of Islamic art that contains some of the finest examples of Islamic artisanship to be found anywhere in the world. In this museum one can see beautifully illuminated Qur'an manuscripts from the Mamluk period (thirteenth to sixteenth centuries CE), embroidered textiles, carved woods, and pottery from the Fatimid period (tenth to twelfth centuries CE), and works of brass, mosaic, and calligraphy from different periods of Egypt's Islamic history. What surprised me as I visited this museum on several occasions was that it was almost always empty, save for the occasional Western tourist or researcher such as myself. Once when I visited Cairo, I hired an Islamist cab driver to take me to the places in the city where I was conducting research. He was an intelligent man and I enjoyed our discussions and debates about Islam and Egypt as we made our way through the heavy Cairo traffic. One day, I needed to visit the Islamic art museum, so I bought my driver a ticket, thinking that he might enjoy the chance to learn something about Egypt's Islamic artistic heritage. After passing through the first exhibit hall, I discovered that he had disappeared. Two hours later, as I exited the building, I found him sitting at the entrance of the museum, chatting with the ticket-taker. When I asked him where he had gone, he replied in an offhand way that he found the entire museum uninteresting.

This is what it means to be a Philistine. What makes the Islamist cab driver's behavior culturally significant is the contrast that one observes in Cairo

between the Museum of Islamic Art, which is virtually empty, and the Egyptian Museum, which contains pre-Islamic art and is always crowded. Even more significant is the fact that the Egyptian Museum is filled not only with foreign tourists but also with large numbers of Egyptian visitors, including Islamist families with men wearing neatly trimmed beards and women veiled in *hijab*. Clearly, Pharaonic art is considered part of Egypt's cultural heritage in a way that Islamic art is not. One of the conclusions that I drew from this paradox was that the Philistinism of Egyptian Islamists is due, at least in part, to the ideological influence of religious fundamentalism. When one visits the artistic remains of the Pharaohs, one is led to recall the stories of the Prophets Joseph and Moses in the Qur'an. Although the Pharaohs were pagans, the cultural artifacts of their past can be legitimized on both nationalistic grounds (as the original Egyptian civilization) and on religious grounds, because the Pharaohs are protagonists in the stories of the Prophets that have been told to popular audiences throughout Islamic history. However, when a Sunni Muslim fundamentalist looks at the cultural artifacts of the Fatimid or Mamluk periods of Egyptian Islamic history, he or she merely observes the artifacts of Shiite "heretics" (the Fatimids) or cruel Turkish despots who oppressed the Egyptian people (the Mamluks). Typically, the fundamentalist observer overlooks the fact that the artistic themes in the Museum of Islamic Art are more Qur'anic in spirit than the artistic themes in the Egyptian Museum. Because the scriptural literalism and constricted historical vision of fundamentalism make little or no room for artistic imagination, the modern Islamist perspective can be nothing but Philistine in its approach to art and culture. This attitude is not unique to Islam, or even to Islamic fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is just as Philistine when it is found in Christianity or Judaism as well.

In an essay entitled, "Pearls of Beauty (on Re-Finding Our Lost Civilization)," Khaled M. Abou El Fadl discusses from the inside of Muslim experience the same dilemma that Jacques Berque noted nearly 30 years earlier as a sympathetic outsider. In the following passage from this essay, Abou El Fadl suggests that both the nostalgic classicism and the Philistinism of modern Islamic culture are consequences of a postcolonial sense of cultural deprivation and inferiority:

> The nomads of the Lost Civilization live frozen in fear—the fear of gazing at the corpse, confronting their loss, and relinquishing their grip over the fossils of antiquity. The chains of their once-glorious memories have condemned them to the mortification of an unrelenting redundancy. Old words and thoughts are uttered like chants in a sanctuary of hallowed memories. They supplicate in the name of a bygone oasis and every mirage becomes their prophecy. Finally, the nomads either settle in their makeshift shelters of ignorance or, if they search the oceans, they dare not open a single shell lest the pearls of perception reveal to them the full extent of their ignoble destitution and agonizing reality.

> Yes, we are the displaced children of the Civilization of the Word, pariahs in the world of thought and literacy. We are the outcasts of the unthinkables and unmentionables, subsisting on the scraps of hardened ideas. We've forgone the pearls of knowledge in fear of being distracted from our sanctimonious memories. Even the word of God is preserved as a memory and not as a thought to be engaged, in search of the pearls it conceals and then reveals. But the life of a word is measured by the pearls that mark its development, not by the shrines that honor its memory.[9]

The chapters that were chosen for the present volume of *Voices of Islam* are all premised on the idea that Islamic civilization has been, and remains, the quintessential Civilization of the Word. In the divine discourse of Islam, as it is expressed in the Qur'an, the concepts of being, reality, and existence are conjoined in the terms, *al-Haqq*—the Truth—and *al-Haqiqa*—Reality, the Real, the "I am what I am" (to paraphrase the Bible), which connote God in the act of self-revelation. In *Surat Yasin* (Qur'an 36), a chapter of the Holy Qur'an that is believed to have an especially powerful surplus of meaning, God says of Himself: "We bring dead things to life and We determine their pasts and their futures; and We have contained all things in a self-revealing paradigm" (Qur'an 36:12). The translation of the Arabic phrase *imam mubin* in this verse as "a self-revealing paradigm" is derived from the French Islamic scholar and Qur'an translator René Blachère, who saw in the concept of *imam mubin* a justification for the popular belief in Islam that the paradigm for all knowledge is contained in the Qur'an.[10] The value of this concept for the present discussion lies in the fact that although the Qur'an comments on moral beauty more often than on aesthetic beauty, aesthetic beauty is still highly valued in the Qur'anic paradigm because God is the self-revealing Creator (*al-Khaliq*), Originator (*al-Bari'*), and Fashioner of Forms (*al-Musawwir*). "To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names" (Qur'an 59:24). Despite the famous hadith that proclaims, "God is beautiful and He loves beauty," *al-Jamil,* the Arabic term for "the Beautiful," is not one of the Divine Names in the Qur'an. However, as the Fashioner of Forms and Possessor of the Beautiful Names, beauty continually flows from God through His act of self-revelation.

Put another way, one can say that in the perspective of the Qur'an, God is the Supreme Artist. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the noted Islamic scholar and commentator on Islamic art, has observed: "God is not only the Grand Architect or Geometer; He is also the Poet, the Painter, the Musician... Being 'created in the image of God' and therefore a supreme work of art, man is also an artist who, in imitating the creative powers of his Maker, realizes his own theomorphic nature. The spiritual man, aware of his vocation, is not only the musician who plucks the lyre to create music. He is himself the lyre upon which the Divine Artist plays, creating the music which reverberates throughout the cosmos, for as Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi says, 'We are

like the lyre which Thou pluckest.'"[11] The lesson to be learned from Nasr's statement is this: When the reader of the present volume approaches chapters on the arts of calligraphy, music, garden design, poetry, literature, and medicine, he or she should always remember that ultimately, in the perspective of Qur'anic Islam, it is God who is the Writer, Designer, Musician, Poet, and Healer. As vicegerents of God, human beings exercise creativity in imitation of the Divine Creativity that brought them and the world into being.

This is an important point to remember because much of the ugliness that has been perpetrated in the name of modern Islam is the unintentional result of a superficial and literalistic understanding of the Word of God. This is not to say, however, that one should not be careful in interpreting the divine discourse. Pious caution has always been a legitimate and important part of tradition in world religions. Although the human being has been given the license to produce works of beauty after the fashion of the Maker, one must be careful not to assume that, like God, one can originate something out of nothing or create something completely without precedent. As Confucius said, "I do not create. I only tell of the past."[12] The challenge for the Muslim artist is how to create beauty out of words, sounds, colors, and materials without arrogating to oneself the role of ultimate Creator. Again, this problem is not confined to Islam alone. In fact, it is as old as the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea and as universal as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The question of creativity and its limits has a long history in Islam. In the medieval Islamic world, creativity was seen as related to inspiration and was discussed with reference to the Arabic term, *khatir* (pl. *khawatir*). In his influential *Treatise on Sufism*, the famous Sufi and scholar Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri of Nishapur (d. 1074 CE) defines *khawatir* as "addresses that arise in the conscious mind" (*khitabat taridu 'ala al-dama'ir*). In other words, for Qushayri, inspirations are like voices inside the head, which may come from self-subsisting knowledge (*min ilqa' malakin*), from Satan (*al-Shaytan*), from the mind or ego-self (*al-nafs*), or from an encounter with God as the Truth (*al-Haqq*).[13] If inspirations come from self-subsisting knowledge, they are "ideas" (*ilham*); if they come from the mind or ego-self, they are "notions" (*hawajis*); if they come from Satan, they are "suggestions" (*wasawis*); if they come from God, they are "true intimations" or "true inspirations" (*khatir haqqin*). The truth of a new idea is proved or disproved by its correspondence to something already known or by testing it in the outer world. By contrast, notions of the ego-self are characterized by their drive to gratify the senses or enhance pride in the self. Satanic suggestions can be recognized because they lead to disobedience of God. However, a true inspiration from God is known because it always leads to success and has no harmful effects on the soul. The problem with creativity is that when it is associated with the mental processes that produce ideas and notions, it can be affected by outside factors, such as the appetites. In such a case, it might be that one cannot distinguish an inspired idea from a Satanic

suggestion. Furthermore, says Qushayri, all of the Sufi masters agree that "the ego-self never tells the truth, but the heart never lies."[14] Thus, from the point of view of Sufi psychology, the modern concept of creativity, which stresses the originality of the individual, self-governed imagination, must always be suspected because the ego-self never tells the truth.

Today, when modern Arabic speakers talk about creativity, they use the term *ibdaʿ*. This term is not used by Qushayri in his discussion of creativity, which suggests that the current use of the term *ibdaʿ* for "creativity" may be a modern innovation. Etymologically, *ibdaʿ* is related to *al-Badiʿ*, "the Originator," which is one of the Names of God in the Qur'an. It is also related to the word *bidʿa*, "innovation," which has often been understood negatively in Islam. The medieval Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-ʿArab* (The Language of the Arabs) by Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din ibn Manzur (d. 1321 CE) mentions the term *ibdaʿ* twice. However, neither mention of the term corresponds to the modern understanding of creativity.[15] For Ibn Manzur, the signification of *ibdaʿ* revolves around the idea of fashioning something: In the first example, it means the fashioning of an object, and in the second example, it refers to God's "fashioning" creation. The modern concept of creativity, in the sense of the creative artist fashioning something completely new, does not seem to have occurred to Ibn Manzur any more than it occurred to Qushayri. The closest approximation to the modern concept of creativity is conveyed in *Lisan al-ʿArab* not by *ibdaʿ*, but by the verbs *ibtadaʿa* and *abdaʿa*. These verbs, which are related in meaning to the disapproved religious concept of *bidʿa*, signify the creation of an unwarranted innovation; in other words, the refashioning of tradition in illegitimate ways. This is expressed in the Qur'an, for example, by the use of the verb *ibtadaʿa* to characterize the Christian "innovation" of monasticism (Qur'an 57:27). Apparently, Ibn Manzur and Qushayri both agreed with the Qur'an and with Confucius that as far as creativity is concerned, one does not create but one only tells of the past.

The Islamic concept of *bidʿa* is discussed at length in Volume 5 of *Voices of Islam* in the chapter "Creativity, Innovation, and Heresy in Islam" by Umar F. Abd-Allah. Thus, it does not need to be discussed any further here. However, it should be noted that the concepts of development (*tatawwur*), progress (*taqaddum*), renaissance (*nahda*), and renewal (*tajdid*), which have been associated with the notion of creativity in modern times, have histories in nineteenth and twentieth-century Islamic thought that make them problematical because they involve changing tradition in the sense expressed by the Qur'anic verb *ibtadaʿa*. Each of these terms has appeared historically in the context of either Arab secularism or Islamic modernism or both, and it has been suggested in certain quarters that the positivistic and progressivistic worldview they imply has contributed to the moral and aesthetic ugliness that pervades much of today's Islamic discourse. As the English Muslim scholar Martin Lings (under his Muslim name of Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din) pointed

out in a lecture at Al-Azhar University in 1964, from the perspective of the Qur'an, ''progress'' (*taqaddum*) is best defined in a religious sense not as the replacement of traditional beliefs with new and improved versions but as a series of steps (from the Arabic word *qadam*) toward spiritual and moral development. ''Every individual should hope to progress, and that is the meaning of our prayer, 'Lead us along the Straight Path''' (Qur'an 1:6).[16]

The fact that an English convert to Islam made this observation, and not a Muslim from the Arab world, Iran, or South Asia, illustrates another aspect of creativity in Islamic civilization that is often overlooked by both nationalist and fundamentalist purists: its *hybridity*. The term, ''hybridity,'' is associated with the writings of Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist from Mumbai who grew up as a Zoroastrian Parsi in a city that was primarily Hindu and secondarily Muslim. As a culture critic, Bhabha purposefully locates his work on the margins of the dominant forms of cultural and intellectual discourse. For Bhabha, hybridity is the ''location'' of creativity in a globalized world.[17] It is a concept of displacement and dislocation, and was characteristic in colonial times both of the metropolitan colonialist who created a parody of European culture in a faraway land and of the colonial subject that mimicked metropolitan values in a morality play of contradictions. Today, hybridity is a major result of the global movement of populations from the former colonies of the Third World to European political and cultural centers, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and now Italy and Spain. It also characterizes the emerging intellectual culture of the United States as the imagined center of a globalized world, a place where the ''imaginary'' of globalization has been recreated in microcosm, especially since the opening of U.S. borders to a greater mix of peoples from Latin America, Asia, and Africa following the reform of immigration laws in 1965. Hybridity thus expresses a place of unresolved tensions, recognitions, and mis-recognitions—a culture of borders and thresholds, of strikingly different references and frames of mind—a place where authoritarian attempts to ''speak with one voice,'' whether it be in the realm of culture, religion, or even language are subverted.

''It is a mistake,'' says Benedict Anderson, ''to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them—as *emblems* of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk-dances, and the rest. Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*.''[18] The same can be said about religion. The mimicry of classical styles in the creation of pseudo-tradition, the fetishization of scripture, and the ideological reformulation of the Islamic *Umma* into an ''Islamic nation'' are all recent examples of the attempt to treat the concept of the ''Islamic'' as an emblem, in the way that languages are used as emblems in nationalistic discourses. The emblematic approach to Islam stifles creativity because it turns selected aspects of Islamic civilization (such as Islamic Law, the Islamic State, Islamic dress, the community of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions) into exhibits in what French critical

theorists call the "museum of the imaginary" (*musée imaginaire*). More importantly, however, it also stifles creativity because it takes the point of "religion"—the bond between the individual human being and God—out of the religion of Islam. The Qur'an reminds Muslims: "Whoever submits himself fully to God and acts with goodness, has indeed grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold. And with God is the resolution of all affairs" (Qur'an 31:22).

The notion of hybridity subverts and undermines fundamentalist and other totalitarian models of religion and culture. Political Islamists resist the study of the full range of Islamic history because knowledge of Islamic history makes it impossible to turn the Arabic language, the Islamic state, or Islamic culture into emblems, and thus to ignore the importance of vernacular expressions of culture, such as Islamic art. The world of Islam has always been full of hybrid communities where many "vernacular languages" of art, politics, and even science have been expressed and many "imagined communities" have arisen within larger communities of discourse. The artistic and creative traditions of Islam have always exhibited what Bhabha calls "vernacular cosmopolitanism," unique local expressions of art and culture that claim the right to "difference in equality" while maintaining "symbolic citizenship" in the Islamic Umma.[19] Vernacular cosmopolitanism can be seen in the traditional Javanese mosque without a minaret, where the muezzin's call to prayer is assisted by the beating of a large drum. It can be seen in Islamic calligraphy from Borneo that merges elements of native Iban decorative motifs with classical Islamic calligraphic styles. It can be seen in the walk-in *mihrab* of the North African and Andalusian mosque, which not only designates the direction of prayer but also recalls the Virgin Mary's use of the *mihrab* as a refuge in the Qur'an (Qur'an 3:37; 19:11). It can even be seen, despite the ideological tendency toward uniform Islamist dress, in the fashion shows of *hijab* styles for women that take place every year in Lebanon, Egypt, and the Gulf. The existence of the vernacular and its stubborn insistence on "difference in equality" is why there has always been a debate about an idealized "Tradition of Islam" versus the historical reality of *traditions* of Islam. Traditionalism is not vernacular. As an idealized construct and an ideology, it speaks with a single, authoritatively imposed voice. This is why traditionalism is oppressive whereas actual traditions allow some degree of creativity. "Oh humankind! We created you from male and female and made you into cultures (*shuʿub*) and tribes so that you may know each other," says the Qur'an (Qur'an 49:13). For contemporary Muslims, this verse should be taken as a reminder that where creativity is concerned, "Globalization must always begin at home."[20]

A common characteristic of the authors in this volume is that they are all products of hybridity and express the tradition of vernacular cosmopolitanism in a modern Islamic context. Martin Lings, as noted above, was an English convert to Islam who lived in Egypt for many years. In this, he is

similar to Emma C. Clark, who spent time in Iran and now teaches at the Prince of Wales' School of Traditional Arts. Frithjof Schuon was an Alsatian, from the border between France and Germany, who lived in Switzerland and the United States and embraced Islam in colonial Algeria. Titus Burckhardt, his longtime friend and collaborator, was German-Swiss and was related to the famous Swiss explorer Jean-Louis Burckhardt. Jean-Louis Michon is French-Swiss and lived for many years in Morocco. Shawkat M. Toorawa's family is from the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean; he was born in England, grew up in France and Singapore, and teaches at Cornell University in upstate New York. Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore has homes in Louisville, Kentucky and Cairo, Egypt. Laleh Bakhtiar, who is of Iranian descent, is a licensed psychologist and psychotherapist who, despite her nontraditional training, writes about traditional Islamic medicine and healing.

In addition, some of the best-known authors in this volume, such as Schuon, Burckhardt, and Lings, are representatives of the so-called Traditionalist school. Writers of the Traditionalist school have been criticized by some modernist and historicist scholars of Islam for maintaining an idealized notion of tradition, for supporting conservative and antimodernist political and cultural positions, and for adhering to a perennial philosophy that is based largely on Neo-Platonism. Certainly, when Schuon writes, in the lead chapter of this volume, "Islamic art is contemplative, whereas Gothic art is volitional," and that Renaissance art is "worldly, hypocritical, sensual, and ostentatious," he is expressing an opinion formed from a particular view of religious expression. However, it is also an opinion derived from a deep comparative knowledge of religious art and from a spiritually profound understanding of *tawhid,* the Islamic theological concept of divine unity. For Schuon, Islamic art is the crystalline unfolding of *tawhid* in countless facets of expression, each reflecting a different perspective of the same divine light. It is crucial to remember that Schuon and his collaborators do not read Islam through Europe; rather, they read Europe through Islam. In doing so, they are not less Islamically authentic than the philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE), whose perennial philosophy interpreted Plato and Aristotle (the "cutting-edge" theorists of his day) through the lens of *tawhid.*

The hybridity that is represented in this volume of *Voices of Islam* should remind the reader that the community of Muslims—the *Umma Muslima*—is today as it always has been: a "community envisaged as a project—at once a vision and a construction."[21] At one point in its history, the construction project of Islamic culture was centered on the Arab world. At another point, it was centered on Iran and Central Asia. In another period, it drew inspiration from Turkey and South Asia. Today Islamic culture is fully global and has as much to do with Europe, America, and Southeast Asia as it does with its former cultural centers. The perspective that one obtains from each of these centers of Islamic culture is as valid as another is.

This being the case, the task of the creative interpreter of Islamic culture is not to erase the past or to impose an artificial homogeneity of cultural expression. Rather, it is to engage, within one's own intellectual or artistic medium, in the time-honored and fully legitimate process of Islamic interpretation as *ta'wil*—to "go back to the beginning" (*ta'awwala*) in order to take Islamic cultural expression beyond where it is at present. Particularly important is to open new horizons of art and creativity by reconnecting Muslims to the transcendent consciousness that created the miracle of Islam in the first place. In the words of Bhabha, a perspective on art and culture that is born of hybridity "does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent, 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living."[22] Such a perspective is indeed "otherwise than modern," but it should not be misconstrued as antimodern. Rather, it is what Bhabha terms *contra-modern*. It is born of modernity and contingent to modernity, but it is resistant to the oppressive homogenization of modernity and its tendency toward totalitarianism.

NOTES

1. Jacques Berque, *Cultural Expression in Arab Society Today* (Langages arabes du présent), trans. Robert W. Stookey (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1978), 197. This poem originally appeared in Nizar Qabbani's 1968 *Diwan* (Collection).
2. Ibid., 198.
3. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4.
4. Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (reprint of Basil Blackwell original, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991), 15. This work was published in the United States as *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley Publishing, 1991).
5. Abdolkarim Soroush, "Life and Virtue: The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Development and Ethics," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43.
6. Seyyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-'Ilm), 109–110. See also, the Arabic edition of this work, Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 2000), 139.
7. Ibid., 136–137.
8. Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *Conference of the Books: The Search for Beauty in Islam* (New York and Oxford: University Press of America Inc., 2001), 114.
9. Ibid., 266–267.

10. Berque, *Cultural Expression,* 171.

11. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Traditional Art as Fountain of Knowledge and Grace," in Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 257.

12. Nasr, "What Is Tradition?" in Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred,* 65.

13. For the full text on inspiration and creativity as *khawatir,* see Abu al-Qasim ʻAbd al-Karim al-Qushayri, *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi ʻilm al-tasawwuf,* ed. Maʻruf Zurayq and ʻAli ʻAbd al-Hamid Beltarji (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1990), 83–85.

14. Ibid., 84.

15. See Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʻArab,* vol. 8 (1883; repr., Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, n.d.), 6–8.

16. Abu Bakr Siraj ad-Din, "The Spiritual Function of Civilization," in *The Sword of Gnosis: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Tradition, Symbolism,* ed. Jacob Needleman (London, Boston, and Henley: Arkana Publications, 1984), 104.

17. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

18. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 133.

19. Bhabha, "Preface to the Routledge Classics Edition," *The Location of Culture,* xvi–xvii.

20. Ibid., xv.

21. Ibid., 4.

22. Ibid., 10.

1

Islamic Art

Frithjof Schuon

The nonfigurative or abstract arts of Judaism and Islam must not be overlooked. The former art was revealed in the Torah and is exclusively sacerdotal. Islamic art is akin to Judaic art by its exclusion of human and animal representations. As to its origin, Islamic art issued from the sensory form of the revealed Book; that is, from the interlaced letters of the verses of the Qur'an, and also, paradoxical though this may seem, from the forbidding of images. This restriction in Islamic art, by eliminating certain creative possibilities, intensified others, the more so since it was accompanied by the express permission to represent plants; hence, the capital importance of arabesques, and of geometrical and botanical decorative motifs. Islamic architecture, the themes of which were inherited from neighboring civilizations, was transmuted by its own particular genius, which tended at the same time both to simplification and to ornamentation. The purest expression of this genius is perhaps the art of the Maghrib (the Islamic West), in which no preexisting formalism invited concessions. In Islam, the love of beauty compensates for the tendency to austere simplicity. It lends elegant form to simplicity and partially clothes it in a profusion of precious and abstract lacework. "God is Beautiful," said the Prophet, "and He loves beauty."

Islamic art allies the joyous profusion of vegetation with the pure and abstract severity of crystals. A prayer niche adorned with arabesques owes something to a garden and to snowflakes. This mixture of qualities is already to be met with in the Qur'an, where the geometry of the ideas is as it were hidden under the flamboyance of forms. Islam, being possessed by the idea of Unity (*tawhid*), if one may so put it, also has an aspect of the simplicity of the desert, of whiteness and of austerity, which, in its art, alternates with the crystalline joy of ornamentation. The cradle of the Arabs is a landscape of deserts and oases. Let us also mention the verbal theophany, which is the psalmodized recitation of the revealed texts,[1] calligraphy being its visual mode,[2] or again, in Islam, the canonical prayer, the majestic movement of

which expresses the sacred in a manner that from the point of view in question is not without relation to the *mudras* of India.

Christianity corresponds to a volitional decision between the here below and the hereafter. Islam, on the other hand, is a sapiential choice of the Truth, and in the light of this Truth, all must be known and evaluated. In metaphysical truth, there is neither here below nor hereafter. Everything is contained in it, and this can be seen in Islamic art. Everything natural to the human being finds its place in this truth. The world is seen in God and thus is given its meaning and spiritual efficacy.

It is understandable that the smiling grace of Islamic architecture should have appeared to many Christians as something worldly and "pagan"; the volitional perspective envisages the "here below" and the "beyond" only as levels of existence that mark separation and opposition, and not as universal essences that unite and make things identical. In Renaissance art, virtue becomes crushing, lugubrious, and tiresome; beside the Alhambra, the palace of Charles V in Granada seeks to be grave and austere, but only achieves a heaviness and an opacity, which banish all higher intelligence, contemplation, and serenity.

After looking at the Alhambra for hours, it became clearer than ever to me that Islamic art is contemplative, whereas Gothic art is volitional, not to speak of the Renaissance, in which the volitional becomes worldly, hypocritical, sensual, and ostentatious. For Charles V the Alhambra was worldly because it is beautiful and joyful, and to this apparent worldliness, he opposed the dull, oppressive, and completely unspiritual ostentatiousness of his palace. Here, ugliness and stupidity wish to pass themselves off as virtues: namely, seriousness, strength, and otherworldliness. The otherworldly is seen purely in "volitional" fashion, as something negative and not as something spiritual that reveals itself in creation.

After the Alhambra and the Alcázar of Seville, I have never seen anything that appeased my spirit more than the Mosque at Córdoba, and I have seldom seen anything that so aroused my indignation as the Christian addition to this mosque. The Catholicism of the Renaissance shows itself here in its most horrible form, a proof that exotericism is aware of only a fraction of the devil's power, and indeed beyond certain limits allows it free play: to be precise, in those realms which concern the Intellect. There is only one ancient and beautiful Madonna there, and one other good old picture. But enough of this.

Islamic art shows in a very transparent way how art should repeat nature—understood in the widest possible sense—in its creative modes without copying it in its results. It is abstract, but also poetical and gracious. It is woven out of sobriety and splendor. The style of the Maghrib (Islamic Spain and North Africa) is perhaps more virile than are the Turkish and Persian styles; but these—and especially the latter—are by way of compensation more varied.[3]

The spiritual intention of Islam is brought clearly to view in its art. Just as its art captures the all-pervading and the all-inclusive, and avoids narrowness of every kind, so does Islam itself seek to avoid whatever is ugly and to keep in sight that which is "everywhere Center." For this reason, it replaces, so to speak, the "cross" by the "weave." A center is a center only at a definite point, it rejects the cross as "association" (*shirk*). It wishes to dissolve a priori every individualistic entanglement. It knows only one Center: God. Every other "center," such as the Prophet Muhammad, or Islam itself, is loosened as in a rhythm or in a "weaving." The Ka'ba too is in its center a world-containing web.

NOTES

This chapter will also appear in the forthcoming volume, *Frithjof Schuon on Universal Art: Principles and Criteria,* edited by Catherine Schuon (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2007). Slight editorial changes have been made to the original for consistency of style and for purposes of clarification. The general editor of this set thanks the editors of World Wisdom Books for permission to reproduce this work.

1. For instance, the chanting of the Qur'an, which can be in various styles, is an art. A choice can be made between one style and another, but nothing can be added to them. One can chant the Qur'an in certain ways, but not in others. The modes of chanting express different rhythms of the spirit.

2. Outside of the Far East, there are scarcely any but the Muslim people who possess calligraphies equivalent to the Chinese ideograms, thanks not only to the richness and plasticity of the Arabic characters but also to the concentration—due to religious reasons—of the pictorial instinct on writing alone.

3. Persian miniatures integrate things in a surface without perspective, and thus in a sense without limits, like a piece of weaving; it is this which makes them compatible—at any rate as "worldly" objects—with the Islamic perspective. In a general way, Muslims distrust any "materialization" of religious subjects, as if in fear that spiritual realities might become exhausted through an excess of sensory crystallization. The sculptured and dramatic imagery of the Roman Church has indeed proven to be a two-edged sword; instead of making it "sensitive" and popular, the Church ought to have maintained in it the hieratic abstraction of Romanesque statuary. It is not the sole obligation of art to come down toward the common people; it should also remain faithful to its intrinsic truth in order to allow men to rise toward that truth.

2

The Foundations of Islamic Art

Titus Burckhardt

"God is beautiful and He loves beauty."

—The Prophet

Unity, in itself eminently "concrete," nevertheless presents itself to the human mind as an abstract idea. This fact, together with certain considerations, connected with the Semitic mentality, explains the abstract character of Islamic art. Islam is centered on Unity, and Unity is not expressible in terms of any image.

The prohibition of images in Islam is not, however, absolute. A plane image is tolerated as an element in profane art, on condition that it represents neither God nor the face of the Prophet;[1] on the other hand, an image "that casts a shadow" is only tolerated exceptionally, when it represents a stylized animal, as may happen in the architecture of palaces or in jewelry.[2] In a general way, the representation of plants and fantastic animals is expressly allowed, but in sacred art stylized plant forms alone are admitted.

The absence of images in mosques has two purposes. One is negative, namely, that of eliminating a "presence" which might set itself up against the Presence—albeit invisible—of God, and which might in addition become a source of error because of the imperfection of all symbols; the other and positive purpose is that of affirming the transcendence of God, since the Divine Essence cannot be compared with anything whatsoever.

Unity, it is true, has a participative aspect, insofar as it is the synthesis of the multiple and the principle of analogy; it is in that aspect that a sacred image presupposes Unity and expresses it in its own way; but Unity is also the principle of distinction, for it is by its intrinsic unity that every being is essentially distinguished from all others, in such a way that it is unique and can neither be confused nor be replaced. This last aspect of Unity reflects most directly the transcendence of the Supreme Unity, its "Non-Alterity" and its absolute Solitude. According to the fundamental formula of Islam: "There is no

divinity other than God" (*la ilaha illalah*), it is through the distinction of the different planes of reality that everything is gathered together beneath the infinite vault of the Supreme Unity: once one has recognized the finite for what it is one can no longer consider it "alongside of" the Infinite, and for that very reason the finite reintegrates itself with the Infinite.

From this point of view the fundamental error is that of projecting the nature of the absolute into the relative, by attributing to the relative an autonomy that does not belong to it: the primary source of this error is imagination, or more precisely illusion (*al-wahm*). Therefore, a Muslim sees in figurative art a flagrant and contagious manifestation of the said error; in his view the image projects one order of reality into another. Against this the only effective safeguard is wisdom (*hikma*), which puts everything in its proper place. As applied to art this means that every artistic creation must be treated according to the laws of its domain of existence and must make those laws intelligible; architecture, for example, must manifest the static equilibrium and state of perfection of motionless bodies, typified in the regular shape of a crystal.

This last statement about architecture needs amplification. Some people reproach Islamic architecture with failing to accentuate the functional aspect of the elements of a building, as does the architecture of the Renaissance, which reinforces heavily loaded elements and lines of tension, thus conferring on constructional elements a sort of organic consciousness. But according to the perspective of Islam, to do so implies nothing less than a confusion between two orders of reality and a lack of intellectual sincerity: if slender columns can in fact carry the load of a vault, what is the good of artificially attributing to them a state of tension, which anyhow is not in the nature of a mineral? In another aspect, Islamic architecture does not seek to do away with the heaviness of stone by giving it an ascending movement, as does Gothic art; static equilibrium demands immobility, but the crude material is as it were, lightened and rendered diaphanous by the chiseling of the arabesques and by carving in the form of stalactites and hollows, which present thousands of facets to the light and confer on stone and stucco the quality of precious jewels. The arcades of a court of the Alhambra, for example, or of certain Northwest African mosques, repose in perfect calm; at the same time they seem to be woven of luminous vibrations. They are like light made crystalline; their innermost substance, one might say, is not stone but the Divine Light, the creative Intelligence that resides mysteriously in all things.

This makes it clear that the "objectivity" of Islamic art—the absence of a subjective urge, or one that could be called "mystical"—has nothing to do with rationalism, and anyhow, what is rationalism but the limitation of intelligence to the measure of man alone? Nevertheless that is exactly what the art of the Renaissance does through its "organic" and subjectively anthropomorphic interpretation of architecture. There is but one step between rationalism and individualistic passion, and from these to a

mechanistic conception of the world. There is nothing of that sort in Islamic art; its logical essence remains always impersonal and qualitative; indeed, according to the Islamic perspective, reason (*al-ʿaql*) is above all the channel of man's acceptance of revealed truths, and these truths are neither irrational nor solely rational. In this resides the nobility of reason, and consequently that of art: therefore to say that art is a product of reason or of science, as do the masters of Islamic art, does not in any sense signify that art is rationalistic and must be kept clear of spiritual intuition, quite the contrary; for in this case reason does not paralyze inspiration, it paves the way toward a non-individual beauty.

The difference that divides the abstract art of Islam from modern "abstract art" may be mentioned here. The moderns find in their "abstractions" a response that is ever more immediate, more fluid, and more individual to the irrational impulses that come from the subconscious; to a Muslim artist, on the other hand, abstract art is the expression of a law, it manifests as directly as possible Unity in multiplicity. The writer of these lines, strong in his experience of European sculpture, once sought to be taken on as a hand by a Northwest African master decorator. "What would you do," said the master "if you had to decorate a plain wall like this one?" "I would make a design of vines, and fill up their sinuosities with drawings of gazelles and hares." "Gazelles and hares and other animals exist everywhere in nature," replied the Arab, "Why reproduce them? But to draw three geometrical rose patterns, one with eleven segments and two with eight, and to link them up in such a way that they fill this space perfectly, that is art."

It could also be said—and this is confirmed by Muslim masters—that art consists in fashioning objects in a manner conformable to their nature, for that nature has a virtual content of beauty, since it comes from God; all one has to do is to release that beauty in order to make it apparent. According to the most general Islamic conception, art is no more than a method of ennobling matter.

The principle which demands that art should conform to the laws inherent in the objects it deals with is no less respected in the minor arts, for example, that of rug making, so characteristic to the world of Islam. The restriction to geometrical forms alone, which are faithful to the flat surface of the composition, and the absence of so-called proper images, have proved to be no obstacle to artistic fertility, on the contrary, for each piece—apart from those mass produced for the European market—expresses a creative joy.

The technique of the knotted rug is probably of nomadic origin. The rug is the real furniture of the nomad, and it is in rugs of nomadic origin that one finds the most perfect and the most original work. Rugs of urban origin often show a certain artificial refinement, which deprives the shapes and colors of their immediate vigor and rhythm. The art of the nomadic rug-maker favors the repetition of strongly marked geometrical forms, as well as abrupt alternations of contrast and a diagonal symmetry. Similar preferences are

apparent throughout almost the whole of Islamic art, and this is very significant with respect to the spirit which those preferences manifest; the Islamic mentality shows a relationship of the spiritual plane to what the nomadic mentality is on the psychological plane: an acute sense of the fragility of the world. A conciseness of thought and action and a genius for rhythm are nomadic qualities.

When one of the first Muslim armies conquered Persia, they found in the great royal hall of Ctesiphon an immense ''carpet of spring'' with decorations of gold and silver. It was taken with other booty to Medina where it was simply cut into as many pieces as there were ancient companions of the Prophet. This apparent act of vandalism was, however, not only in conformity with the rules of war as laid down by the Qur'an, but it also gave expression to the profound suspicion felt by Muslims for every work of man that seeks to be absolutely perfect or eternal—the carpet of Ctesiphon incidentally portrayed the earthly Paradise, and its division among the companions of the Prophet is not without spiritual significance.

This too must be said: although the world of Islam, which is more or less coextensive with the ancient empire of Alexander,[3] includes many peoples with a long sedentary history, yet the ethnic waves, which have periodically renewed the life of these people, and imposed on them their domination and their preferences, have always been of nomadic origin: Arabs, Seljuks, Turks, Berbers, and Mongols. In a general way, Islam combines badly with an urban and bourgeois ''solidification.''[4]

Traces of the nomadic mentality can be found even in Islamic architecture, although architecture belongs primarily to sedentary culture. Thus, constructional elements such as columns, arches, and portals have a certain autonomy, despite the unity of the whole; there is no organic continuity between the various elements of a building; when it is a case of avoiding monotony—and monotony is not always considered an evil—it is achieved less by the gradual differentiation of a series of analogous elements than by incisive changes. The ''stalactites'' in stucco hung from the inner surfaces of the arches and the patterns of the arabesques ''carpeting'' the walls certainly keep alive some reminiscences of nomadic ''furnishings,'' consisting as they do of rugs and tents.

The primitive mosque, in a form of a vast hall of prayer with its roof stretched horizontally and supported by a palm-grove of pillars, comes near to the nomadic environment; even an architecture as refined as that of the mosque at Cordova, with its superposed arcades, is reminiscent of a palm-grove.

The mausoleum with a cupola and a square base accords with the nomadic spirit in the conciseness of its form.

The Islamic hall of prayer, unlike a church or a temple, has no center toward which worship is directed. The grouping of the faithful round a center, so characteristic of Christian communities, can only be witnessed in

Islam at the time of the pilgrimage to Mecca, in the collective prayer round the Ka'ba. In every other place, believers turn in their prayers toward that distant center, external to the walls of the mosque. But the Ka'ba itself does not represent a sacramental center comparable to the Christian altar, nor does it contain any symbol which could be an immediate support to worship,[5] for it is empty. Its emptiness reveals an essential feature of the spiritual attitude of Islam: whereas Christian piety is eager to concentrate on a concrete center—since the "Incarnate Word" is a center, both in space and in time, and since the Eucharistic sacrament is no less a center—a Muslim's awareness of the Divine Presence is based on a feeling of limitlessness; he rejects all objectivation of the Divine, except that which presents itself to him in the form of limitless space.

Nonetheless, a concentric plan is not alien to Islamic architecture, for such is the plan of a mausoleum roofed with a cupola. The prototype of this plan is found in Byzantine as well as in Asiatic art, where it symbolizes the union of Heaven and Earth, the rectangular body of the building corresponding to the Earth and the spherical cupola to Heaven. Islamic art has assimilated this type while reducing it to its purest and clearest formulation: between the cubical body and the more or less ogival cupola, an octagonal "drum" is usually inserted. The eminently perfect and intelligible form of such a building can dominate the indeterminate spaciousness of an entire desert landscape. As the mausoleum of a saint it is effectively a spiritual center of the world.

The geometrical genius, which asserts itself so strongly in Islamic art, flows directly from the kind of speculation favored by Islam, which is "abstract" and not "mythological." There is moreover no better symbol in the visual order of the internal complexity of Unity—of the passage from the Indivisible Unity to "Unity in multiplicity" or "multiplicity in Unity"—than the series of the regular geometrical figures contained within a circle, or that of the regular polyhedra contained within a sphere.

The architectural theme of a cupola with ribs resting on a rectangular body, to which it is connected in many different ways, has been abundantly developed in the Islamic countries of Asia Minor. This style is found on the art of building in brick, and from it Gothic architecture, with all its speculative spirit, probably received its first impulses.

The sense of rhythm, innate in nomadic people, and the genius for geometry: these are the two poles which, transposed into the spiritual order, determine all Islamic arts. Nomadic rhythmicality found its most direct expression in Arab prosody, which extended its influence as far as the Christian troubadours, while speculative geometry belongs to the Pythagorean inheritance very directly taken over by the Muslim world.

Art to the Muslim is a "proof of the divine existence" only to the extent that it is beautiful without showing the marks of a subjective individualistic inspiration; its beauty must be impersonal, like that of the starry sky. Islamic art does indeed attain to a kind of perfection that seems to be independent

of its author; his triumphs and his failures disappear before the universal character of the forms.

Whenever Islam has assimilated a preexisting type of architecture, in Byzantine countries as well as in Persia and in India, subsequent development has been in the direction of a geometrical precision having a qualitative character—neither quantitative nor mechanical—which is attested by the elegance of its solutions of architectural problems. It is in India that the contrast between the indigenous architecture and the artistic ideals of the Muslim conquerors is without doubt most marked. Hindu architecture is at once lapidary and complex, elementary and rich, like a sacred mountain with mysterious caverns; Islamic architecture leans toward clarity and sobriety.

Wherever Islamic art appropriates incidental elements from Hindu architecture, it subordinates their native power to the unity and the lightness of the whole.[6] There are some Islamic buildings in India that are numbered among the most perfect in existence; no architecture has ever surpassed them.

But Islamic architecture is most faithful to its peculiar genius in the *Maghrib,* the West of the Muslim world. Here, in Algeria, in Morocco and in Andalusia it realizes the state of crystalline perfection that turns the interior of a mosque—or of a palace—into an oasis of freshness, a world filled with a limpid and almost unworldly beatitude.[7]

The assimilation of Byzatine models by Islamic art is exemplified with special clarity in the Turkish variations on the theme of the Hagia Sophia. As is well known, the Hagia Sophia consists of an immense central dome flanked by two half-cupolas, which in their turn are amplified by several vaulted apses. The whole covers a space more extensive in the direction of one axis than of the other; the proportions of the resulting environment are highly elusive and seem to be indefinite owing to the absence of conspicuous articulations. Muslim architects like Sinan, who took up the theme of a central cupola amplified by adjacent cupolas, found new solutions more strictly geometrical in conception. The Selimiye mosque at Edima is a notably characteristic example; its huge dome rests on an octagon with walls alternately flat and curved into apses, resulting in a system of plane and curved facets with clearly defined angles between them. This transformation of the plan of the Hagia Sophia is comparable to the cutting of a precious stone, made more regular and more brilliant by polishing.

Seen from inside, the cupola of a mosque of this type does not hover in indefinity, nor does it weigh upon its pillars. Nothing expresses effort in Islamic architecture; there is no tension, nor any antithesis between Heaven and Earth. "There is none of that sensation of a heaven descending from above, as in the Hagia Sophia, nor the ascending tendency of a Gothic cathedral. The culminating point in the Islamic prayer is the moment when the forehead of the believer prostrated on the rug touches the floor, that mirror-like surface which abolishes the contrast of height and depth and

makes space a homogeneous unity with no particular tendency. It is by its immobility that the atmosphere of a mosque is distinguished from all things ephemeral. Here infinity is not attained by a transformation from one side of a dialectical antithesis to the other; in this architecture the beyond is not merely a goal, it is lived here and now, in a freedom exempt from all tendencies; there is a repose free from all aspiration; its omnipresence is incorporated in the edifice so like a diamond" (after Ulya Vogt-Goknil).[8]

The exterior of Turkish mosques is characterized by the contrast between the hemisphere of the dome, more in evidence than in the Hagia Sophia, and the needles of the minarets: a synthesis of repose and vigilance, and of submission and active witness.

In the arabesque, the typical creation of Islam, the geometrical genius meets the nomadic genius. The arabesque is a sort of dialectic of ornament, in which logic is allied to a living continuity of rhythm. It has two basic elements, the interlacement and the plant motif. The former is essentially a derivative of geometrical speculation, while the latter represents a sort of graphic formulation of rhythm, expressed in spiraloid designs, which may possibly be derived not so much from plant forms as from a purely linear symbolism. Ornaments with spiraloid designs—heraldic animals and vines—are also found in the art of Asiatic nomads, the art of the Scythians is a striking example.

The elements of Islamic decorative art are drawn from the rich archaic heritage that was common to all the peoples of Asia as well as to those of the Near East and of northern Europe. It came to the surface again as soon as Hellenism, with its essentially anthropomorphic art, had gone into retreat. Christian medieval art picked up this same heritage, brought to it by the folklore of immigrant peoples from Asia, and by insular art, both Celtic and Saxon, itself one of the most astonishing syntheses of prehistoric motifs. But this heritage was soon obscured and diluted in the Christian world by the influence of Graeco-Roman models, assimilated by Christianity. The Islamic spirit has a much more direct affinity with this vast current of archaic forms for they are in implicit correspondence with its conscious return toward a primordial order, toward the "primordial religion" (*din al-fitra*). Islam assimilates these archaic elements and reduces them to their most abstract and most generalized formulations; it levels them out in a certain sense, and thereby eliminates any magical qualities they may have possessed; in return, it endows them with a fresh intellectual lucidity, one might almost say—with a spiritual elegance.

The arabesque, which is the outcome of this synthesis, has also analogies in Arab rhetoric and poetry; a rhythmical outpouring of thought is given precision by parallels and inversions strictly interlinked. The Qur'an itself uses the same means of expression; in its periods they become elements in a spiritual algebra and rhythms of incantation. Thus, the Divine witness of

the Burning Bush, which the Hebrew Bible conveys in the words "I am that I am" is rendered in the Qur'an by the paraphrase: "I am God, beside whom there is no divinity but I."

At the risk of pressing the point too hard, let it be said that for a Muslim the arabesque is not merely a possibility of producing art without making images; it is a direct means for dissolving images or what corresponds to them in the mental order, in the same way as the rhythmical repetition of certain Qur'anic formulae dissolves the fixation of the mind on an object of desire. In the arabesque, all suggestions of an individual form are eliminated by the indefinity of a continuous weave. The repetition of identical motifs, the flamboyant movement of lines and the decorative equivalence of forms in relief or incised, and so inversely analogous, all contribute to this effect. Thus, at the sight of glittering waves or of leafage trembling in the breeze, the soul detaches itself from its internal objects, from the "idols" of passion, and plunges, vibrant within itself, into a pure state of being.

The walls of certain mosques, covered with glazed earthenware mosaic or a tissue of delicate arabesques in stucco, recall the symbolism of the curtain (*hijab*). According to a saying of the Prophet, God hides Himself behind 70,000 curtains of light and the darkness; "if they were taken away, all that His sight reaches would be consumed by the lightnings of His Countenance." The curtains are made of light in that they hide the Divine "obscurity," and of darkness in that they veil the Divine Light.

Islam regards itself as the renewal of the primordial religion of humanity. The Divine Faith has been revealed through the mediation of the prophets or the "messengers," at very different times to the most diverse people. The Qur'an is but the final confirmation, the "seal," of all these numerous revelations, the sequence of which goes back to Adam; Judaism and Christianity have the same title to inclusion in the sequence as the revelations that preceded them.

This is the point of view that predisposes Islamic civilization to take to itself the heritage of more ancient traditions, at the same time stripping the legacy of its mythological clothing, and reclothing it with more "abstract" expressions, more nearly in conformity with its pure doctrine of Unity. Thus it is that the craft traditions, such as persisted in Islamic countries to the very threshold of our times, are generally said to have come down from certain pre-Islamic prophets, particularly from Seth, the third son of Adam, who reestablished the cosmic equilibrium after the murder of Abel by Cain. Abel represents nomadism, the rearing of animals, and Cain sedentarism, the cultivation of the earth; Seth is therefore synonymous with the synthesis of the two currents.[9]

Pre-Islamic prototypes preserved in the craft tradition also came to be connected with certain parables in the Qur'an and with certain sayings of the Prophet, in the same way as pre-Christian traditions assimilated by Christianity were connected with Gospel parables analogous to them.

In speaking of his ascent to Heaven (*mi'raj*) the Prophet describes an immense dome made of white mother-of-pearl and resting on four corner pillars, on which are written the four parts of the Qur'anic formula: "in the name—of God—the Compassionate—the Merciful," and from which flow four rivers of beatitude, one of water, one of milk, one of honey and one of wine. This parable represents the spiritual model of every building with a dome. Mother-of-pearl or white pearl is the symbol of the Spirit (*al-ruh*), the "dome" of which encloses the whole creation. The universal Sprit, which was created before all other creatures, is also the Divine Throne which comprehends all things (*al-'arsh al-muhit*).

The symbol of this Throne is invisible space extending beyond the starry sky; from the terrestrial point of view, which is natural to man and affords the most direct symbolism, the stars move in concentric spheres more or less remote from the earth as center, and surrounded by limitless space which in its turn is "enclosed" by the universal Spirit considered as the metaphysical "situation" of all perception or knowledge.

While the dome of a sacred building represents the universal Spirit, the octagonal "drum" that supports it symbolizes the eight angels, "bearers of the Throne," who in their turn correspond to the eight directions of the "rose of the winds." The cubical part of the building then represents the cosmos, with the four corner pillars (*arkan*) as its elements, conceived as principles both subtle and corporeal.

The building as a whole expresses equilibrium, the reflection of the Divine Unity in the cosmic order. Nevertheless since Unity is always Itself, whatever the degree at which It is envisaged, the regular shape of the building can also be transposed *in divinis;* the polygonal part of the building will then correspond to the "facets" of the Divine Qualities (*al-sifat*) while the dome recalls undifferentiated Unity.[10]

A mosque generally comprises a court with a fountain, where the faithful can make their ablutions before accomplishing their prayers. The fountain is often protected by a small cupola shaped like a baldaquin. The court with a fountain in the middle, as well as the enclosed garden watered by four runnels rising in its center, are made in the likeness of Paradise, for the Qur'an speaks of the gardens of Beatitude, where springs of water flow, one or two in each garden, and where celestial virgins dwell. It is in the nature of Paradise (*janna*) to be hidden and secret; it corresponds to the interior world, the innermost soul. This is the world which the Islamic house must imitate, with its inner court surrounded with walls on all four sides or with an enclosed garden furnished with a well or fountain. The house is the *sacratum* (*haram*) of the family, where woman reigns and man is but a guest. Its square shape is in conformity with the Islamic law of marriage, which allows a man to marry up to four wives, on condition that he offers the same advantages to each. The Islamic house is completely closed toward the outer world—family life is withdrawn from the general

social life—it is only open above, to the sky, which is reflected beneath in the fountain court.

The spiritual style of Islam is also exemplified in the art of clothing, and particularly in the masculine costume of purely Islamic countries. The part played by costume has a special importance, because no artistic ideal established in painting or sculpture can replace or relativize the living presence of man in his primordial dignity. In one sense, the art of clothing is effective and even popular; it is nevertheless indirectly a sacred art, for the masculine costume of Islam is as it were a priestly costume generalized, just as Islam "generalized" the priesthood by abolishing the hierarchy and making every believer a priest. Every Muslim can perform the essential rites of his tradition by himself; anyone, provided that his mental faculties are intact and his life conforms to his religion, may in principle preside as *Imam* over any gathering great or small.

The example of the Mosaic law makes it clear that priestly costume as such is a branch of sacred art in the strictest sense of the word. Its formal language is determined by the dual nature of the human form, which is the most immediate symbol of God and at the same time, because of its egocentricity and subjectivity, the thickest of the veils that hide the Divine Presence. The hieratic garments of Semitic peoples hide the individual and subjectively "passionate" aspect of the human body, and emphasize on the contrary its "god-like" qualities. These qualities are brought out by combining their microcosmic evidences, more or less veiled by the polyvalence of the human form, with their macrocosmic evidences; thus, in the symbolism of the clothing, the "personal" manifestation of God is united with His "impersonal" manifestation, and through the complex and corruptible form of man, the simple and incorruptible beauty of the stars is projected. The golden disk which the High Priest in the Old Testament wore on his breast corresponds to the sun; the precious stones which adorn various parts of his body and are placed so as to correspond to the subtle centers of the *shekhina,* are like stars; his headdress is like the "horns" of the crescent moon: and the fringes of his vestments recall the dew or the rain of Grace.[11] Christian liturgical vestments perpetuate the same formal language, while relating it to the sacerdotal function of the Christ, who is both officiant and victim of the sacrifice.[12] Alongside the priestly vestment with its solar characteristics, there is the monastic garment, which serves only to efface the individual and sensual aspects of the body,[13] whereas the costume of the laity, with the exception of the insignia of consecrated kings and the heraldic emblems of nobles,[14] originates merely in plain necessity or in worldliness. In this way, Christianity make a distinction between the priest, who participates by virtue of his impersonal function in the glory of the Christ, and the profane person, whose whole attire can be but vanity, and who is integrated with the formal style of the tradition only when he assumes the garb of the penitent. It may be noted in this connection that modern masculine attire shows a curious

inversion of these qualities: its negation of the body, with its natural suppleness and beauty, becomes the expression of a new individualism, hostile to nature and coupled with an instinctive hatred of all hierarchy.[15]

The masculine costume of Islam is a synthesis of the sacerdotal and the monastic attire, and at the same time it affirms masculine dignity. It is the turban which, according to the saying of the Prophet,[16] is the mark of spiritual, and therefore sacerdotal dignity, together with the white color of the clothing, the cloak with board folds and the *haik* enveloping the head and shoulders. Certain articles of clothing appropriate to dwellers in the desert have been generalized and "stylized" for a spiritual purpose. On the other hand, the monastic character of the Islamic costume is affirmed by its simplicity and by the more or less strict prohibition[17] of golden ornaments and of silk. Women alone may wear gold and silk, and then it is not in public but only in the interior of the house—which corresponds to the inner world of the soul—that they may display such finery.

Wherever an Islamic civilization is beginning to decay, the turban is the first thing that is banished, and next the wearing of loose and pliable garments that facilitate the movements of the ritual prayer. As for the campaign that is waged in certain Arab countries in favor of the hat, it is aimed directly at the abolition of the rites. For the rim of a hat prevents the forehead from touching the ground in the prostration; the cap with the peak, so peculiarly suggestive of the profane, is no less inimical to the tradition. If the use of machines necessitates the wearing of such clothes, it simply proves that, from the point of view of Islam, reliance on machines draws man away from his existential center, where he "stands upright before God."

This description of Islamic costume would not be complete without some mention of the "sacred vestment" (*ihram*) of the pilgrim, worn on the occasion of the great pilgrimage (*al-hajj*) to the interior of the sacred territory that includes Mecca. The pilgrim wears only two pieces of cloth without a seam, tied round the shoulders and the hip, and sandals on his feet. Thus attired he is exposed to the intense heat of the sun, conscious of his poverty before God.

The noblest of the visual arts in the world of Islam is calligraphy, and it is the writing of the Qur'an that is sacred art *par excellence;* it plays a part more or less analogous to that of the icon in Christian art, for it represents the visible body of the Divine Word.[18]

In sacred inscriptions the Arabic letters combine fluently with arabesques, especially with plant motifs, which are thus brought into closer relationship with the Asiatic symbolism of the tree of the world; the leaves of this tree correspond to the words of the Sacred Book. Arabic calligraphy contains within itself decorative possibilities of inexhaustible richness; its modalities vary between the monumental Kufic script with its rectilinear form and vertical breaks, and the *naskhi* with its line as fluid and as serpentine as it could be. The richness of the Arabic script comes from the fact that it has fully

developed its two "dimensions": the vertical, which confers on the letters their hieratic dignity, and the horizontal, which links them together in a continuous flow. As in the symbolism of weaving, the vertical lines, analogous to the "warp" of the fabric, correspond to the permanent essences of things—it is by the vertical that the unalterable character of each letter is affirmed—whereas the horizontal, analogous to the "weft," expresses becoming or the matter that links one thing to another. A significance of this kind is particularly evident in Arab calligraphy, where the vertical strokes transcend and regulate the undulating flow of the connecting strokes.

Arabic is written from right to left; this is as much as to say that the writing runs back from the field of action toward the heart. Among all the phonetic scripts of Semitic origin, Arabic writing has the least visual resemblance to Hebrew writing; Hebrew is static like the stone of the Tables of the Law, while at the same time it is full of the latent fire of the Divine Presence, whereas Arabic manifests Unity by the breadth of its rhythm: the broader the rhythm the more its unity becomes evident.

The friezes of inscriptions crowning the inner wall of a hall of prayer, or surmounting the *mihrab,* recall to the believer, as much by their rhythm and their hieratic form as by their meaning, the majestic and forceful current of the Qur'anic language.

This plastic reflection of a Divine incantation traverses the whole of Islamic life; its expressive richness, its upsurge endlessly renewed and its inimitable rhythms compensate the elusive simplicity of its content, which is Unity; it is immutability of idea and inexhaustible flow of utterance, architectural geometry, and indefinite rhythm of ornament.

The *mihrab* is the niche oriented toward Mecca and is the place where the *imam* who recites the ritual prayer stands in front of the rows of believers who repeat his gestures. The primary function of this niche is acoustic, to reecho the words directed toward it; but at the same time its form is reminiscent of that of a choir or an apse, the "holy of holies," the general shape of which it reproduces on a smaller scale. This analogy is confirmed in the field of symbolism by the presence of the lamp hung in front of the niche of prayer.[19] The lamp recalls the "niche of light" of which it is said in the Qur'an: "God is the light of the heavens and of the earth. His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass, which is like a shining star. . . ." (Qur'an 24:35).

Here is something like a meeting-point between the symbolism of the mosque and the Christian temple, as well as of the Jewish temple and perhaps of the Parsee temple. To return, however, to the acoustic function of the prayer-niche: it is by virtue of its reverberation of the Divine Word during the prayer that the *mihrab* is a symbol of the Presence of God, and for that reason the symbolism of the lamp becomes purely accessory, or one might say "liturgical";[20] the miracle of Islam is the Divine Word directly revealed in the Qur'an and "actualized" by ritual recitation. This makes it possible

to situate Islamic iconoclasm very precisely: the Divine Word must remain a verbal expression, and as such instantaneous and immaterial, in the likeness of the act of creation; thus alone will it keep its evocative power pure, without being subject to that attrition which the use of tangible materials instills, so to speak, into the very nature of the plastic arts, and into the forms handed on through them from generation to generation. Being manifested in time but not in space, speech is outside the ambit of the changes brought about by time in spatial things; nomads know this well, living, as they do, not by images but by speech This is the point of view and the manner of its expression natural to peoples in migration and particularly to Semitic nomads; Islam transposes it into the spiritual order[21] conferring in return on the human environment, particularly on architecture, an aspect of sobriety and intellectual transparency, as a reminder that everything is an expression of the Divine Truth.

NOTES

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1. When Mecca was conquered by the Muslims, the Prophet first ordered the destruction of all the idols which the pagan Arabs had set up on the court of the Ka'ba; then he entered the sanctuary. Its wall had been ornamented by a Byzantine painter, among other figures were one of Abraham throwing divinatory arrows and another of the Virgin and Child. The Prophet covered the last named with his two hands and ordered the removal of all the others.

2. An artist newly converted to Islam complained to Abbas, uncle of the Prophet, that he no longer knew what to paint (or carve). The patriarch advised him to attempt nothing but plants and fantastic animals, such as those that do not exist in nature.

3. It can be said that Alexander was the artisan of the world that was destined for Islam, in the same way that Caesar was the artisan of the world that was to welcome Christianity.

4. One of the reasons for the decadence of Muslim countries in modern times is the progressive suppression of the nomadic element.

5. The famous black stone is set in a corner of the Ka'ba. It does not mark the center toward which the believers turn in their prayers, and besides, it has no "sacramental" function.

6. From its inception, Islamic architecture integrated into itself certain elements of Hindu and Buddhist architecture, but these elements had come to it through the arts of Persia and Byzantium; it was only later on that Islamic civilization directly encountered that of India.

7. The analogy between the nature of crystal and spiritual perfection is implicitly expressed in the following formula which emanates from the Caliph Ali: "Muhammad

is a man, not like other men, but like a precious stone among stones." This formula also indicates the point of junction between architecture and alchemy.

8. *Turkische Moscheen* (Zurich: Origo-Verlag, 1953).

9. René Guenon, *Cain et Abel* in *Le Regne de la Quantité et Les Signes des Temps,* Paris, NRF, 1945, English translation (London, U.K.:Luzac, 1953).

10. See Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction aux doctrines esoteriques de l'Islam* (Lyon: Derain, 1955).

11. Analogous symbols are found in the ritual costume of the North American Indians: the headdress with bison horns, and the fringes of the garment as an image of rain of grace. The headdress of eagle's feathers recalls the "Thunder Bird" which rules from on high, also the radiant sun, both being symbols of the Universal Spirit.

12. See Simeon of Thessalonica, *De divino Templo.*

13. Nudity can also have a sacred character, because it recalls the primordial state of man and because it abolishes the separation between man and Universe. The Hindu ascetic is "clothed in space."

14. Heraldry has probably a dual origin. In part it is derived form the emblems of nomadic tribes—from "totems," and in part from Hermetism. The two currents mingled in the Near East under the Empire of the Seljuks.

15. Modern masculine attire, which has its origin partly in the French Revolution and partly in English Puritanism, represents an almost perfect synthesis of antispiritual and antiaristocratic tendencies. It affirms the forms of the body, while "correcting" them to fit in with a conception that is inept as well as being hostile to nature and to the intrinsically divine beauty of man.

16. The turban is called "the crown (or the diadem) of Islam."

17. It is not a question of canonical interdiction but of a reprobation, applied more strictly to gold than to silk.

18. The disputes among Islamic theological schools about the created or uncreated nature of the Qur'an are analogous to the disputes among Christian theologians about the two natures of the Christ.

19. This is the motif reproduced in a more or less stylized form on many prayer-rugs. It may be mentioned that the prayer niche is not always furnished with a lamp, no such symbol being obligatory.

20. The conch, which adorns a few of the most ancient prayer niches, is in fact derived as an architectural feature from Hellenic art. However, it scorns to be connected with the very ancient symbolism in which the conch is compared to the ear and the pearl to the Divine Word.

21. Islamic iconoclasm has another side to it: man being created in the image of God, to imitate his form is regarded as blasphemy. But this point of view is a consequence of the prohibition of images rather than a main reason for it.

3

The Common Language of Islamic Art

Titus Burckhardt

ARAB ART, ISLAMIC ART

One may well ask whether the term ‘‘Arab art’’ corresponds to a well-defined reality since Arab art before Islam does not in practice exist for us because of the scarcity of its remains, and Arab art born under the sky of Islam is confused—and one wonders to what degree—with Islamic art itself. Art historians never fail to stress that the first Muslim monuments were not built by the Arabs, who lacked adequate technical means, but by levies of Syrian, Persian, and Greek craftsmen, and that Muslim art was gradually enriched by the artistic heritage of the sedentary populations of the Near East as these were taken into Islam. Despite this, it is still legitimate to speak of Arab art, for the simple reason that Islam itself, if it is not limited to a ‘‘racial phenomenon’’—and history is there to prove the point—does nonetheless comprise Arab elements in its formal expression, the foremost of which is the Arabic language; in becoming the sacred language of Islam, Arabic determined to a greater or lesser degree the ‘‘style of thinking’’ of all the Muslim peoples.[1] Certain typically Arab attitudes of soul, spiritually enhanced by the *Sunna* (customary usage) of the Prophet, entered into the psychic economy of the entire Muslim world and are reflected in its art. It would, indeed, be impossible to confine the manifestations of Islam to Arabism; on the contrary, it is Arabism that is expanded and, as it were, transfigured by Islam.

In order to grasp the nature of Islamic-Arab art—the Muslim will naturally stress the first part of this term, and the non-Muslim the second—it is always necessary to take account of this marriage between a spiritual message with an absolute content and a certain cultural inheritance which, for that very reason, no longer belongs to a culturally defined collectivity but becomes a ‘‘mode of expression’’ which can, in principle, be used universally. Moreover, Islamic-Arab art is not the only great religious art to be born from such a marriage; Buddhist art, for example, whose area of expression is chiefly confined to Mongol nations, nevertheless preserves certain typically Indian

traits, particularly in its iconography, which is of the greatest importance to it. In a far more restricted context, Gothic art of German-Latin lineage provides an example of a "style" so widespread that it became identified, from a certain moment on, with the Christian art of the West.

Without Islam, the Arab thrust of the seventh century—even supposing it to have been possible without the religious impulse—would have been no more than an episode in the history of the Middle East; decadent as they may have been, the great sedentary civilizations would have made short work of absorbing these hordes of Bedouin Arabs, and the nomadic invaders of the cultivated lands would have finished, as is generally the case, by accepting the customs and forms of expression of the sedentaries. But it was exactly the opposite that happened in the case of Islam, at least in a certain regard: it was the Arabs, nomads for the most part, who imposed on the sedentary peoples they conquered their forms of thought and expression by imposing their language on them.[2] In fact, the outstanding, and somehow refulgent, manifestation of the Arab genius is language, including writing. It was this language which not only preserved the ethnic heritage of the Arabs outside Arabia but also caused it to radiate far beyond its cultural homeland. It was by the mediation of the Arabic language that the essential Arab genius was effectively communicated to Muslim civilization as a whole.

The extraordinary normative power of the Arabic language derives from its role as a sacred language as well as from its archaic nature, both factors being, in any case, connected. It is its archaic quality that predestined Arabic for its role as a sacred language, and it was the Qur'anic revelation that, as it were, actualized its primordial substance. Archaism, in the linguistic order, is not, in any event, synonymous with simplicity of structure—very much to the contrary. Languages generally grow poorer with the passing of time by gradually losing the richness of their vocabulary; the ease with which they can diversify various aspects of one and the same idea; and their power of synthesis, which is the ability to express many things with few words. In order to make up for this impoverishment, modern languages have become more complicated on the rhetorical level; while perhaps gaining in surface precision, they have not done so as regards content. Language historians are astonished by the fact that Arabic was able to retain a morphology attested to as early as the Code of Hammurabi,[3] from the nineteenth to the eighteenth century before the Christian era, and to retain a phonetic system which preserves, with the exception of a single sound, the extremely rich sound range disclosed by the most ancient Semitic alphabets discovered,[4] although there was no "literary tradition" to bridge the gap between the far-off age of the Patriarchs and the time when the Qur'anic revelation would establish the language for all time.

The explanation of this perennial quality of Arabic is to be found simply in the conserving role of nomadism. It is in towns that languages decay, by becoming worn out, like the things and institutions they designate. Nomads, who live to some extent outside time, conserve their language better; it is,

moreover, the only treasure they can carry around with them in their pastoral existence; the nomad is a jealous guardian of his linguistic heritage, his poetry, and his rhetorical art. On the other hand, his inheritance in the way of visual art cannot be rich; architecture presupposes stability, and the same is broadly true of sculpture and painting. Nomadic art, in general, is limited to simple, yet striking, graphic formulas, ornamental motifs, heraldic emblems, and symbols. In the situation we are studying, the existence of these formulas is by no means a negligible factor, for they carry creative potentialities that will blossom forth when they meet the artistic techniques belonging to the sedentary civilizations. It is true that the presence of these model formulas among the pre-Islamic Arabs is not generally apparent except retrospectively, by analogy with what we find with other nomads and in consideration of the sudden flowering in the Muslim art of the first centuries of ornamental motifs which are vastly different in their modes from anything coming from the sedentary civilizations and which are, in some way, parallel to the figurative "devices" of the Arab language.

In order to explain in a few words, and without recourse to specialized linguistic knowledge, the specific nature of the Arabic language, let us first of all recall that every language has at its beginnings two poles, as it were, one of which comes to predominate without excluding the other. These two poles can be described by the terms "auditive intuition" and "imaginative intuition." Auditive intuition essentially identifies the meaning of a word with its quality as sound; this presents itself as the development of a simple phonetic formula which expresses a fundamental action such as "to unite," "to separate," "to penetrate," "to emerge," and so on, with all the physical, psychological, and intellectual polyvalence of which a type-action of this kind is capable. This has, moreover, nothing to do with semantic convention or onomatopoeia; the identification of sound and act is immediate and spontaneous, and in this regard, speech conceives everything it names as being basically an act or as the object of an act. Imaginative intuition, on the contrary, manifests itself in speech by the semantic associations of analogous images; every word pronounced evokes inwardly a corresponding image, which calls up other images, with the type-images dominating the more particular ones, according to a hierarchy that stamps itself, in its turn, on the structure of speech. The Latin languages are examples of this latter type, whereas Arabic discloses an almost untrammelled auditive intuition or phonetic logic, in which the identity of sound and act, as well as the primacy of action, is affirmed across the entire rich tissue of this language. In principle, every Arabic word is derived from a verb consisting of three invariable consonants, something like an aural ideogram, from which are derived as many as 12 different verbal modes—simple, causative, intensive, reciprocal, and so on—and each of these modes produces in its turn a plethora of nouns and adjectives whose first meaning is always linked, in a more or less direct way, to that of the fundamental action depicted by the trilateral root[5] of the entire verbal "tree."

This semantic transparency of the language, the fact that in its symbolism it flows wholly from the phonetic character of the verb, is a clear proof of its relative primordiality. In the beginning, and in the very seat of our consciousness, things are spontaneously conceived as determinations of the primordial sound which resounds in the heart, this sound being none other than the first, non-individualized, act of consciousness; at this level, or in this state, to "name" a thing is to identify oneself with the action or the sound which bring it forth.[6] The symbolism inherent in speech—and obscured or deformed to a greater or lesser extent by acquired habits—seizes on the nature of things not in a static fashion, as an image is seized, but, as it were, *in statu nasciendi,* in the act of becoming. This aspect of language in general, and of the Arabic language in particular, is moreover, in the Muslim world, the object of a whole gamut of sciences, some philosophical and others esoteric. Muslim scholars can be said not only to have conserved this structure of Arabic but also to have contributed to its precise definition.

In Arabic, the "tree" of verbal forms, of derivations from certain "roots" is quite inexhaustible; it can always bring forth new leaves, new expressions to represent hitherto dormant variations of the basic idea—or action. This explains why this Bedouin tongue was able to become the linguistic vehicle of an entire civilization intellectually very rich and differentiated.

Let us point out, nevertheless, that the logical link between a form of expression and its verbal root is not always easy to grasp, because of the occasionally conventionalized meaning given to that particular form and the extremely complex significance of the root idea. One orientalist has gone so far as to say that "the structure of the Arabic language would be of incomparable transparency were the meanings of the verbal roots not arbitrary"; but it is actually hardly possible for the basis of a language to be arbitrary. The truth is that the verbal roots constitute a threshold between discursive thought and a kind of synthetic perception.[7] The Arabic language is, as it were, dependent upon auditive intuition and we shall see, in what follows, what this signifies for art.

It would be tempting to say that the Arab does not so much see things as hear them, but that would be a false generalization. It is true, nevertheless, that the need for artistic exteriorization is, in the Arab, largely absorbed by the cultivation of his language with its fascinating phonetic range and almost unlimited possibilities of expression. If the term contemplative be taken to describe the type of man who contemplates rather than acts and whose mind loves to repose in the being of things, then the Arab, who possesses a dynamic mentality and an analytical intelligence, is no contemplative. But that he is nevertheless contemplative is proved by Islam and confirmed by Arab art. Contemplation is not, in any case, limited to simply static modes; it can pursue unity through rhythm, which is like a reflection of the eternal present in the flow of time.

Plastic examples illustrating these tendencies leap to the eye. The arabesque in particular, with its both regular and indefinite unfolding, is the most direct expression of rhythm in the visual order. It is true that its most perfect forms are inconceivable without the artistic contribution of the nomads of Central Asia; it was, however, in an Arab *milieu* that it flowered most resplendently. Another element which is typical of Muslim art, and whose development goes side by side with Arab domination, is interlacement. It first appears in all its perfection in the form of sculptured trellis-work on the windows of mosques and palaces.[8] In order to appreciate the geometrical play of interlacement, it is not enough simply to look at it head on; it must be "read," by letting the eye follow the flow of intertwining and compensating forces. Interlacement exists already in the pavement mosaics of late antiquity, but it is rudimentary and naturalistic in conception, without any of the complexity and rhythmic precision of Arab-Muslim interlacing work. These examples belong to abstract art, which is itself a characteristic of the Arab genius. Contrary to what is customarily believed, the average Arab does not by any means possess an "extravagant imagination." Whenever such imagination is found in Arab literature, in the *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights* for example, it comes from some non-Arab source, Persian and Indian in this case; only the art of storytelling is Arab. The creative spirit of the Arabs is *a priori* logical and rhetorical, then rhythmic and incantational. The luxuriance of typically Arab poetry lies in mental and verbal arabesque and not in the profusion of images evoked.

Islam rejects portraiture for theological reasons. Now it is a fact that the Semitic nomads had no figurative tradition—the pre-Islamic Arabs imported most of their idols from abroad—and the image never became a natural and transparent means of expression for the Arabs. Verbal reality eclipsed the reality of static vision: compared with the word for ever "in act," whose root is anchored in the primordiality of sound, a painted or a carved image seemed like a disquieting congealment of the spirit. For the pagan Arabs, it smacked of magic.

The Arabic language is not wholly dynamic; true, its base is the action-verb, but it possesses likewise a static, or more exactly a timeless, ground which corresponds with "being," and which reveals itself particularly in the so-called nominal sentence, where the noun and its predicates are juxtaposed without a copula, thereby permitting a thought to be expressed in a lapidary fashion and without any consideration of time. The Arabic language is such that a whole doctrine can be condensed into a short and concise formula of diamantine clarity. This means of expression is realized in all its fullness only in the Qur'an, yet it is part of the Arab genius nonetheless and is reflected in Arab-Muslim art, for this art is not only rhythmical but also crystalline.

The conciseness of the Arabic sentence does not, quite clearly, limit the profundity of the meaning, but neither does it facilitate synthesis on the descriptive level: an Arab will rarely assemble a number of conditions or

circumstances in a single sentence; he prefers to string together a series of brief phrases. In this respect, an agglutinative language like Turkish, which belongs to the family of Mongol languages, is less austere and more flexible than Arabic; when it comes to describing a situation or a landscape, Turkish is frankly superior to Arabic, and the same applies to Persian which is an Indo-European language close to Gothic; however, both languages have borrowed not only their theological terminologies but also their philosophical and scientific terms, from Arabic.

The opposite extreme to Arabic is a language like Chinese, which is ruled by a static vision of things and which groups the elements of a thought around generic images, as is shown by the ideographic nature of Chinese script.

The Turks, like the Arabs, were originally nomads, but their languages reveal vastly different mental types; the Arab is incisive and dynamic in his thought processes; the Turk, for his part, is all-embracing and circumspect. In the general framework of Muslim art, the Turkish genius reveals itself by a certain power of synthesis—one might almost say, by a totalitarian spirit. The Turk has a plastic or sculptural gift which the Arab does not have; his works always proceed out of an all-enveloping concept; they are as if hewn from a single block.

As for Persian art, it is distinguished by its sense of hierarchical gradations; Persian architecture is perfectly articulated, without ever being "functional" in the modern sense of the term. For the Persian, Unity manifests itself above all as harmony. Moreover, Persians are, by nature and by culture, people who see things, but see with lyrical eyes; their artistic activity is as if animated by an inner melody. It is said proverbially in the East that "Arabic is the language of God, but Persian is the language of paradise," and this describes very well the difference that exists, for example, between a distinctively Arab type of architecture, like that of the Maghrib, where crystalline geometry of forms proclaims the unitary principle, and Persian architecture, with its blue domes and floral decoration.

The Arab architect is not afraid of monotony; he will build pillar upon pillar and arcade upon arcade, and dominate repetition by rhythmic alternation and the qualitative perfection of each element.

The language of the Qur'an is omnipresent in the world of Islam; the entire life of a Muslim is filled with Qur'anic formulas, prayers, litanies, and invocations in Arabic, the elements of which are drawn from the Sacred Book; innumerable inscriptions bear witness to this. It could be said that this ubiquity of the Qur'an works like a spiritual vibration—there is no better term to describe an influence which is both spiritual and sonorous—and this vibration necessarily determines the modes and measures of Muslim art; the plastic art of Islam is therefore, in a certain way, the reflection of the word of the Qur'an. It is assuredly very difficult to grasp the principle by which this art is linked to the text of the Qur'an, not on the narrative plane, which plays no part in the customary art of Islam, but on the level of formal structures,

since the Qur'an obeys no laws of composition, neither in the strangely disconnected linking together of its themes nor in its verbal presentation, which evades all the rules of meter. Its rhythm, powerful and penetrating as it is, follows no fixed measure; entirely unpredictable, it maintains at times an insistent rhyme like the beat of a drum and will then suddenly modify its breadth and pace, shifting its cadences in a manner as unexpected as it is striking. To affirm that the Qur'an is Arabic verse, because it includes passages with a uniform rhyme like the Bedouin *rajaz,* would be mistaken; but to deny that these uniformities and abrupt breaks correspond to profound realities in the Arab soul would be equally so. Arab art—poetry and music as well as the plastic arts—loves to repeat certain forms and to introduce sudden and unforeseen variants against this repetitive background. But, whereas art is played out in accordance with easily fathomable rules, the waves of sacred speech may sometimes fall in regular patterns, but they arise out of a whole formless ocean. In the same way, the state of inner harmony engendered by the words and sonorous enchantment of the Qur'an is situated on quite another plane than, for example, perfect poetry. The Qur'an does not satisfy, it gives and at the same time takes away; it expands the soul by lending it wings, then lays it low and leaves it naked; for the believer, it is both comforting and purifying, like a rainstorm. Purely human art does not possess this virtue. That is to say, there is no such thing as a Qur'anic style which can simply be transposed into art; but there does exist a state of soul which is sustained by the recitation of the Qur'an and which favours certain formal manifestations while precluding others. The diapason of the Qur'an never fails to join intoxicating nostalgia to extreme sobriety: it is a radiation of the divine Sun on the human desert. It is to these poles that the fluid and flamboyant rhythm of the arabesque, and the abstract and crystalline character of architecture, in some way correspond.

But the most profound link between Islamic art and the Qur'an is of another kind: it lies not in the form of the Qur'an but in its *haqiqa,* its formless essence, and more particularly in the notion of *tawhid,* unity or union, with its contemplative implications; Islamic art—by which we mean the entirety of plastic arts in Islam—is essentially the projection into the visual order of certain aspects or dimensions of Divine Unity.

NOTES

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1. The great Muslim scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, born in 973 CE at Khiva, wrote on this subject: "Our religion and our empire are Arab…subject tribes have

often joined together to give the state a non-Arab character. But they have not been able to achieve their aim, and as long as the call to prayer continues to echo in their ears five times a day, and the Qur'an in lucid Arabic is recited among the worshippers standing in rows behind the Imam, and its refreshing message is preached in the mosques, the will needs submit, the bond of Islam will not be broken, nor its fortresses vanquished. Branches of knowledge from all countries in the world have been translated into the tongue of the Arabs, embellished and made seductive, and the beauties of languages have infused their veins and arteries, despite the fact that each people considers its own language beautiful, since it is accustomed to it and employs it in its daily offices. I speak from experience, for I was reared in a language in which it would be strange to see a branch of knowledge enshrined. Thence I passed to Arabic and Persian, and I am a guest in both languages, having made an effort to acquire them, but I would rather be reproved in Arabic than complimented in Persian."

2. Certain people will raise the objection that not all Arabs were nomads and that there were cities in Arabia like Mecca and Yathrib (Medina) before Islam. The answer is that in Central Arabia, where Islam had its birth, nomadism was broadly predominant; even the aristocracy of the Quraysh, formed of caravan merchants, is inconceivable without a nomadic background. It is true that Mecca already constituted a spiritual center and, therefore, a factor making for stability in the midst of tribal fluctuations. But Mecca is precisely the anchor that Islam used to transform the ethnic substance represented by the nomadic Arabs into a religious community.

3. See Edouard Dorme, "L'Arabe littéral et la langue de Hammourabi," in *Mélanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1957).

4. The most ancient Semitic alphabets have a total of 29 sounds or letters, 28 of which are retained by Arabic, the "missing" sound being a variant of "S." It is possible that the reduction of the alphabet to 28 letters conveys a symbolic purpose, for certain Arab authors see a correspondence between these sounds and the 28 stations of the moon. The phonetic cycle progressing from gutturals to palatals, dentals, and labials retraces the "lunary" phases of primordial sound emanating from the sun.

5. There do exist verbs composed of four- or five-root consonants, but in such cases, consonantal groups such as *ts* or *br* play the role of single sounds.

6. According to Qur'an 2:31–33, it was Adam who was able to "name" all beings, whereas the angels could not.

7. The phonetic symbolism that inheres in Arabic is revealed in particular by the permutation of radical consonants; for example, the root RHM signifies "to be merciful" or "to have pity on," whereas the root HRM has the sense of "to forbid," "to make inaccessible," *sacrum facere;* similarly, the root QBL has the sense of "to face" or "to receive" (whence the Hebrew word *Qabbalah*), while the root QLB has the sense of "to return" or "to reverse" (whence the term *qalb* meaning "matrix" and "heart"). A further example is the root FRQ, meaning "to separate" or "to divide" (the Latin word *furca* seems to be derived from an analogous root), and its permutation RFQ has the sense of "to accompany" or "to join," whereas the group FQR means "to be poor, in want."

8. In the Umayyad mosque at Damascus, for example, or the palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar.

4

The Art and Ambience of Islamic Dress

Frithjof Schuon

When the arts are enumerated, the art of dress is too often forgotten, although it has an importance as great, or almost as great, as architecture. Doubtless, no civilization has ever produced summits in every field. Thus, the Arab genius, made up of virility and resignation, has produced a masculine dress of unsurpassed nobility and sobriety, whereas it has neglected feminine dress, which is destined in Islam, not to express the "eternal feminine" as does the Hindu dress, but to hide a woman's seductive charms. The Hindu genius, which in a certain sense divinizes the "wife-mother," has on the other hand created a feminine dress unsurpassable in its beauty, its dignity, and its femininity. The art of dress of every civilization, and even of every people, embraces many varying forms in time and space, but the spirit always remains the same, though it does not always reach the same heights of direct expression and immediate intelligibility.

The Maghribi garb of North Africa, like other nonworldly Muslim garbs, suggests resignation to the Will of God, and more profoundly the mystery of the House of Peace, *Dar al-Salam*. This calls for another comment: If it is true that Maghribi garb, or any other analogous Muslim garb, manifests a *de facto* religious perspective, exclusivistic by definition, along with the specific blessing (*baraka*) that it contains, it is no less true—and necessarily so—that this garb manifests at the same time attitudes and mysteries appertaining to esoterism. In this sense, it suggests no confessional limitation. Each civilization produces, by heavenly inspiration, several paradigmatic phenomena. The representative dress of Islam is an example of this, as are the arabesques, the prayer niche, and the call to prayer.

The association of ideas between the turban and Islam is far from fortuitous. "The turban," said the Prophet, "is a frontier between faith and unbelief." He also said, "My community shall not decline so long as they wear the turban." The following traditions are also quoted in this context: "On the Day of Judgment a man shall receive a light for each turn of the turban around his head." "Wear turbans, for thus you will gain

in generosity.'' The point we wish to make is that the turban is deemed to give the male believer a sort of gravity, consecration, and majestic humility.[1] It sets him apart from chaotic and dissipated creatures, fixing him on a divine axis and thus destines him for contemplation. In brief, the turban is like a celestial counterpoise to all that is profane and empty. Since it is the head, the brain, which is for us the plane of our choice between true and false, durable and ephemeral, real and illusory, and serious and futile, the head should also bear the mark of this choice. The material symbol is deemed to reinforce the spiritual consciousness, and this is true of every religious headdress and even of every liturgical vestment or merely traditional dress. The turban, so to speak, envelops man's thinking, always so prone to dissipation, forgetfulness, and infidelity. It recalls the sacred imprisoning of his passional nature prone to fleeing from God.[2] The function of the Qur'anic Law is to reestablish a primordial equilibrium that was lost. Hence, the *hadith:* ''Wear turbans and thus distinguish yourselves from the peoples (lacking in equilibrium) who came before you.''

Hatred of the turban, like hatred of the romantic or the picturesque, or what belongs to folklore, is explained by the fact that the romantic worlds are precisely those in which God is still plausible. When people want to abolish Heaven, it is logical to start by creating an atmosphere that makes spiritual things appear out of place. In order to be able to declare successfully that God is unreal, they have to construct around man a false reality, one that is inevitably inhuman because only the inhuman can exclude God. What is involved is a falsification of the imagination and so its destruction. Modern mentality implies the most prodigious lack of imagination possible.

Overall, the dress of the Muslim indicates a spiritual retreat (*khalwa*), an ''interiorization'' of the spirit made of holy poverty and divine Peace.

NOTES

The above chapter is excerpted from the article, ''The Art of Dress and Ambience,'' which will appear in the forthcoming volume, *Frithjof Schuon on Universal Art: Principles and Criteria,* edited by Catherine Schuon (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2007). Slight editorial changes have been made to the original for consistency of style and for purposes of clarification. Portions of the chapter have also been abridged. The general editor of this set thanks the editors of World Wisdom Books for permission to reproduce this work.

1. In Islam, all Prophets are represented as wearing turbans, sometimes of differing colors, according to the appropriate symbolism.

2. When Saint Vincent de Paul designed the headdress of the Sisters of Charity, he intended to impose on their gaze a kind of reminiscence of monastic isolation.

5

The Question of Images

Titus Burckhardt

ANICONISM

The prohibition of images in Islam applies, strictly speaking, only to the image of the Divinity; it stands, therefore, in the perspective of the decalogue, or more exactly of Abrahamic monotheism, which Islam sees itself as renewing. In its last manifestation as in its first—in the time of Muhammad as in the age of Abraham—monotheism directly opposes idolatrous polytheism,[1] so that any plastic representation of the divinity is for Islam, according to a "dialectic" that is both historical and divine, the distinctive mark of the error which "associates" the relative with the Absolute, or the created with the Uncreated, by reducing the one to the level of the other. To deny idols, or still better to destroy them, is like translating into concrete terms the fundamental testimony of Islam, the formula *La ilaha illa 'Llah* ("there is no divinity save God"), and just as this testimony in Islam dominates or consumes everything in the manner of a purifying fire, so also does the denial of idols, whether actual or virtual, tend to become generalized. Thus it is that portraiture of the divine messengers (*rusul*), prophets (*anbiya'*), and saints (*awliya'*) is avoided, not only because their images could become the object of idolatrous worship but also because of the respect inspired by their inimitability; they are the viceregents of God on earth; "God created Adam in His form" (a saying of the Prophet), and this resemblance of man to God becomes somehow manifest in prophets and saints, without it being possible, even so, to grasp this on the purely corporeal level; the stiff, inanimate image of a divine man could not be other than an empty shell, an imposture, an idol.

In Sunni Arab circles, the representation of any living being is frowned upon, because of respect for the divine secret contained within every creature,[2] and if the prohibition of images is not observed with equal rigor in all ethnic groups, it is nonetheless strict for everything that falls within

the liturgical framework of Islam. Aniconism—which is the appropriate term here, and not iconoclasm[3]—became somehow an inseparable concomitant of the sacred; it is even one of the foundations, if not the main foundation, of the sacred art of Islam.

This may appear paradoxical, for the normal foundation of a sacred art is symbolism, and in a religion expressing itself in anthropomorphic symbols—the Qur'an speaks of God's "face," His "hands" and the throne He sits upon—the rejection of images seems to strike at the very roots of a visual art dealing with things divine. But there is a whole array of subtle compensations that need to be borne in mind, and in particular the following: a sacred art is not necessarily made of images, even in the broadest sense of the term; it may be no more than the quite silent exteriorization, as it were, of a contemplative state, and in this case—or in this respect—it reflects no ideas but transforms the surroundings qualitatively, by having them share in an equilibrium whose centre of gravity is the unseen. That such is the nature of Islamic art is easily verified. Its object is, above all, man's environment—hence the dominant role of architecture—and its quality is essentially contemplative. Aniconism does not detract from this quality; very much to the contrary, for, by precluding every image inviting man to fix his mind on something outside himself and to project his soul onto an "individualizing" form, it creates a void. In this respect, the function of Islamic art is analogous to that of virgin nature, especially the desert, which is likewise favorable to contemplation, although in another respect the order created by art opposes the chaos of the desert landscape.

The proliferation of decoration in Muslim art does not contradict this quality of contemplative emptiness; on the contrary, ornamentation with abstract forms enhances it through its unbroken rhythm and its endless interweaving. Instead of ensnaring the mind and leading it into some imaginary world, it dissolves mental "fixations," just as contemplation of a running stream, a flame, or leaves quivering in the wind can detach consciousness from its inward "idols."

It is instructive to compare Islam's attitude to images with that of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Byzantine Church is known to have gone through an iconoclast crisis, perhaps not uninfluenced by the example of Islam. Certainly, the church was moved to reconsider defining the role of the sacred image, the icon; and the Seventh Ecumenical Council, in confirming the victory of the adorers of images, justified its decision in the following words: "God Himself is beyond all possible description or representation, but since the Divine Word took human nature upon itself, which it 'reintegrated into its original form by infusing it with divine beauty', God can and must be adored through the human image of Christ." This is no more than an application of the dogma of divine incarnation, and it shows how far this way of seeing things is from the viewpoint of Islam. Nevertheless, the two perspectives have a common basis in the notion of man's theomorphic nature.

The declaration of the Seventh Ecumenical Council took the form of a prayer addressed to the Holy Virgin, for it is the Virgin who lent the Divine Child her human substance, thus making Him accessible to the senses. This act of veneration recalls incidentally the gesture of the Prophet in placing both hands in protection on the icon of the Virgin and Child painted on the inner wall of the Ka'ba.

It might well be thought that this gesture ought to have led to a concession in Islamic law permitting representation of the Holy Virgin. But this would be to misconstrue the spiritual economy of Islam, which puts aside every superfluous or equivocal element, although this does not prevent Muslim masters of the "inward science" (*al-'ilm al-batin*) from acknowledging the meaning and legitimacy of icons in their proper context. We actually have a particularly profound vindication of the Christian veneration of icons in the words of one of the greatest masters of Muslim esoterism, the Sufi Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi who wrote in his *Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*). "The Byzantines developed the art of painting to perfection because, for them, the singular nature (*al-fardaniyya*) of our Lord Jesus is the supreme support of concentration upon Divine Unity." It will be seen that this interpretation of the icon, although it is far removed from Muslim theology as generally accepted, is nevertheless at home in the perspective of *tawhid,* the doctrine of Divine Unity.

Apart from this, the words of the Prophet condemning those who aspire to imitate the work of the Creator have not always been interpreted as a rejection pure and simple of all figurative art; many have taken them only as condemning Promethean or idolatrous intent.

For Aryan peoples like the Persians, as well as for the Mongols, the representational image is far too natural a mode of expression for them to be able to pass it over. But the anathema against artists seeking to imitate the work of the Creator remains nonetheless effective, for figurative Muslim art has always avoided naturalism; it is not simply ingenuousness or ignorance of visual means that causes Persian miniatures not to use perspective giving the illusion of three-dimensional space or not to model the human body in light and shade. In the same way, the zoomorphic sculpture occasionally met with in the world of Islam never exceeds the bounds of a kind of heraldic stylization; its products could not possibly be mistaken for living and breathing creatures.

To recapitulate the question whether figurative art is prohibited or tolerated in Islam, we conclude that figurative art can perfectly well be integrated into the universe of Islam provided it does not forget its proper limits, but it will still play only a peripheral role; it will not participate directly in the spiritual economy of Islam.

As for Islamic aniconism, two aspects in all are involved. On the one hand, it safeguards the primordial dignity of man, whose form, made "in the image of God,"[4] shall be neither imitated nor usurped by a work of art that is

necessarily limited and one-sided; on the other hand, nothing capable of becoming an ''idol,'' if only in a relative and quite provisional manner, must interpose between man and the invisible presence of God. What utterly outweighs everything else is the testimony that there is ''no divinity save God''; this melts away every objectivization of the Divine before it is even able to come forth.

NOTES

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1. It is no pleonasm to speak of ''idolatrous polytheism,'' as is shown by Hinduism, which is polytheist but in no way idolatrous because it recognizes the provisional and symbolic nature of idols and the relative nature of the ''gods'' (*devas*) as ''aspects'' of the Absolute. The esoteric Muslims, the Sufis, occasionally compare idols to Divine Names whose significance has been forgotten by the pagans.

2. According to a saying of the Prophet, artists who seek to imitate the work of the Creator will be condemned in the hereafter to give life to their creations, and their inability to do so will cause them to be cast into the worst torments. This saying can clearly be understood in several ways; it has, in fact, never prevented the growth, in certain Muslim circles, of a figurative art free from any claims to naturalism.

3. ''Aniconism'' can have a spiritually positive character, whereas ''iconoclasm'' has only a negative sense.

4. From the Islamic point of view, the ''divine form'' of Adam consists essentially of the seven universal faculties that are likewise attributed to God, namely: life, knowledge, will, power, hearing, seeing, and speech; in man they have limits, but in God none. Even as attributed to man, they cannot be seen and go beyond his bodily form, which alone can be the object of any art.

6

The Art of Qur'an Calligraphy

Martin Lings

The need to record and hand down to succeeding generations every syllable of the Qur'an with exactitude made it impossible to rely on anything so fallible as human memory, even though the memories in question were outstanding. But the point to be made here is not that people ungiven to writing and building should have come to be, through the force of circumstances, both writers and builders. The analogy we are drawing is based on the change from almost nothing to almost everything; and in the case of calligraphy, the change is perhaps even more striking than in that of architecture. It might even be said not only that the Arabs have never been surpassed as calligraphers[1] but also that they have only been equaled by one other people, namely the Chinese, whose art has, however, developed along very different lines.

It cannot, however, be considered a paradox that the civilization of the Unlettered Prophet[2] should have been destined to excel in the art of lettering. Even apart from the probable advantages of starting an enterprise uncluttered by previous experiences, the Arabs' disinclination to write down precious words had no doubt a very positive part to play in the genesis of Arabic calligraphy. These people were in love with the beauty of their language and with the beauty of the human voice. There was absolutely no common measure between these two summits on the one hand and the ungainliness of the only available script on the other. Their disdain for writing showed a sense of values; and in light of final results it is legitimate to suppose that it was the reverse side of an openness to calligraphic inspiration, as much as to say, "Since we have no choice but to write down the Revelation, then let that written record be as powerful an experience for the eye as the memorised record is for the ear when the verses are spoken or chanted."

The most usual explanation of the phenomenon we are now considering is that of human genius having been curbed from the art of sculpture, and from that of painting in most of its aspects, and made to flow with all its force into a relatively narrow channel. But this explanation, despite its elements of truth, is really more of a question than an answer, for it impels us to ask,

"Where did that force come from? What was it doing before the outset of Islam? Was it a dormant potentiality that the new Revelation awoke?"

It is impossible to deny that human genius has a vital part to play in sacred art; but there is genius and genius. In art that is related to religion, a distinction has to be made between sacred art in the strict sense and art that is religious without being sacred; and this means making a distinction between a genius which is dominated and penetrated by its own transcendent archetype, and a genius which is more or less cut off from that archetype and free to follow its own devices.

This distinction is one which Western Christendom has been trying not to see for almost the last 500 years. It is nonetheless fundamental and becomes immediately clear in light of a wider context. For if a sensitive and intelligent Christian be confronted with an ancient Egyptian wall-painting of Osiris, for example, or a sacramental statue of Buddha, and if he be asked, "What has your religion produced that can measure up to these?" it is then that he is compelled to see the limitations of humanism, and to return, for an answer, to the theomorphic art of the Middle Ages. The Islamic answer to the same question would be in an altogether different mode—a prayer niche in one of the great mosques or perhaps, despite the smaller dimensions, something within the scope of a book on Islamic calligraphy. Miniature painting, in which the Persians excelled, is only on the periphery of Islamic art and does not come near to the central and sacred domain.[3]

In his concise yet far-reaching definition of what may be said to constitute a religion, Frithjof Schuon includes the presence of sacred art as one of the criteria of authenticity.[4] This will not seem surprising to anyone who bears in mind that the function of sacred art, always in the strictest sense of the term, is parallel to that of the Revelation itself as a means of causing repercussions in the human soul in the direction of the Transcendent. It is seldom, however, contemporary with the initial impact of a religion, and it is thus able to compensate for certain losses, above all as a means of expressing to later generations something of what the presence of the Messenger expressed to the first generation. The Qur'an makes it clear that a Prophet must be considered as a Divine Masterpiece. In one passage, God says to Moses what could be translated: "I have fashioned thee as a work of art for Myself" (Qur'an 20:41); and in another, Muhammad is told: "Verily of an immense magnitude is thy nature" (Qur'an 68:4).

To compensate for an absence is to be a prolongation of a presence; and this function is at once apparent in Christian sacred art, of which the icon is as it were the cornerstone. But it also becomes apparent as regards Qur'an calligraphy and illumination when we remember that to be the vehicle of the Revelation was the primary function of the Prophet of Islam.

If sacred art comes as a half-miraculous sign that Providence has not abandoned the religion since its foundation, and if it therefore comes implicitly as a guarantee of that religion's Divine Origin, it is also a criterion

of authenticity in the way that a result is a criterion of its cause. To see this we have to simply remember that the function of religion is to bring about a restoration, if only a virtual one, of man's primordial state. Each new Revelation, whatever form it may take, is destined to precipitate a renewal of consciousness, in a particular people or group of people, that man was made in the image of God and that as His representative he is the mediator between Heaven and Earth. The difference between man and all other creatures is that the latter merely reflect various Divine Qualities, whereas man reflects the Divine Essence, which comprises all the Qualities. The difference between man and man is that though each reflects the Totality, one individual will have certain qualities as it were in the foreground of his nature, whereas another will have others in the foreground and so on, with a never exactly repeated variation. Each soul thus offers a differently ordered receptivity to the imprint of the Divine Nature, so that when that imprint is renewed by the pressure of the Revelation, the general excelling of oneself which results from it will be in different directions. As we learn from the Islamic litanies of the 99 Divine Names, God is not only the King, the Just, the Wise, the Omniscient, the Almighty, the Victorious, and the Irresistible, but He is also the Beautiful, the Creator, the Former, the Marvelously Original, and the All-Holy, and here lies the metaphysical inevitability of sacred art as a result of the Revelation. Here also lie the roots of all artistic genius, and it is only from these roots that a tradition of sacred art can spring; a tradition which will eventually enable less-gifted artists to participate in the consecrated genius of others and to excel themselves beyond all measure, whence the connection between sacred art and the traditional arts and crafts.

In other words, sacred art presupposes, somewhere, inspiration in the fullest sense. But the word "somewhere" is significant, for even where a definite name is attached to a masterpiece, there is always the possibility that the known artist worked under the influence of an unknown visionary, and there may be more than one generation between the perfector of any given style and the man who received the initial spiritual impetus. This possibility, which is in the nature of things, is nowhere more widely recognized than in the civilization of Islam. Thus, for example, when a celebrated fifteenth-century grammarian of Egypt, Khalid al-Azhari, is quoted as saying that he had been prompted to write one of his most important works by a great Sufi Sheikh of his day, the quoter adds the following note, "The good done by most of those who are famous for their outward science has been achieved through their frequenting the company of a saint, that is a man of inward science;" and he goes on to mention the founder of the Shadhili order of Sufis and his successor as eminent personifications of an outward-radiating inward science.[5]

Moreover, apart from such possibilities, it must be remembered that sacred art is always strikingly impersonal[6] through its transcendence of the individual. All the more fitting therefore that it should be anonymous, as in fact so

much of it is, and there can be no doubt that a large part of its anonymity has been deliberate, resulting from the consciousness of this or that artist that the work in question is not, ultimately speaking, "his."

To have one of its poles in Heaven and to have come into existence by a path that is something of a parallel to the process of creation are essential conditions without which sacred art could never fulfill its ritual or liturgical function as a "Jacob's Ladder" of return. It is in virtue of its parallel "descent" that a great cathedral or mosque or other monument of sacred art has the privilege of being able to stand amidst the wilds of nature without the eye condemning it as an alien presence, and the rungs of these ladders of return offer the worshipper the relatively effortless means of taking a higher standpoint, which, by repetition and by combination with other means, can even become more or less permanent. The way of creation is also the way of revelation, and in the particular art which is our theme the connection with revelation is very direct. Calligraphy and illumination are as it were compensations for such contingencies as ink and paper, a "step up" that makes it possible, in a flash of wonderment, to approach more nearly and penetrate more deeply the Divine Substance of the Qur'anic text, and thus to receive a "taste," each soul according to its capacity, of the Infinite and the Eternal. The use here of the Sufi term "taste"—in Arabic *dhawq*—may be taken as a reminder of the close connection, in all traditions, between sacred art and mysticism.

As regards the earthly pole of sacred art, it is normal that a certain technical development should need to take place. It cannot be expected that Heaven should always dictate to man the details, as it did, exceptionally, in the case of Solomon's Temple, and the delay caused by the interval of man's apprenticeship is, as we have seen, in perfect harmony with the Providential function of a spiritual support that is needed far less at the outset of a new religion than in subsequent generations. Meantime the Revelation makes it clear that the Archetype of Qur'an calligraphy already exists in Heaven, "in a hidden book" (Qur'an 56:78), accessible only to angels. Nor can it be in the spiritual nature of things that its earthly manifestation should depend mainly on human initiative.

NOTES

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1. With the Arabs must be included certain others of those people—preeminently the Persians and the Turks—for whom Arabic is the liturgical language, but the Arabs themselves were the pioneers.

2. So Muhammad is named in the Qur'an (7:157–158) and, by extension, in many Islamic litanies.

3. For one remarkable exception however, which is truly a work of sacred art, though it could never have a central place in the civilization of Islam, see Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (London, U.K.: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976), plate 13. The miniature in question depicts the Night Journey of the Prophet and a postcard of it is sometimes available at the British Library where the manuscript in question is (Or. 2265.f.195a).

4. See the opening of Chapter 2 in Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London, U.K.: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976).

5. Ibn Hamdun, *Sharh al-Ajurrumiyya*.

6. See Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* (Ghent: Sophia Perennis, 1969), 29–33. See also, in general, Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West* (Ghent: Sophia Perennis, 1967).

7

The Art of Qur'an Illumination

Martin Lings

The art of Qur'an illumination was bound to develop more slowly than that of calligraphy because it was not directly called for by the text. It was furthermore held in check by the fear of allowing anything to intrude upon that text. More positively, we can be certain that it was this same reverential awe, *hayba,* which guaranteed exactly the right channels for the flow of this development toward a result which is, by general agreement, marvellously right. "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This saying of Solomon, continually quoted in Islam, is itself a synthesis of wisdom which has its application at all levels. Sacred art is "wise," and from what has already been said about its anonymity, it follows that the art of Qur'an calligraphy itself, let alone that of illumination, was bound to start on a note of "reserve," a pious courtesy related to awe and to the artist's consciousness of the Divine Majesty.

The main features of Qur'an illumination have been outlined more than once;[1] but to understand the significance of these features we have no alternative but to consult what was, beyond any doubt, the source of inspiration. Moreover, this source will give us a profound insight into the outlook, we might even say the psychic substance, of the artist himself. It is difficult for Christians, whose primary access to the Divine Presence is not through words, to imagine how deeply a book can penetrate a soul which deliberately invites such penetration. Many of the calligraphers and not a few of the illuminators would have known the Qur'an by heart from beginning to end. But even when they did not know it all, the passages quoted in this and other chapters would have been so familiar as to be almost an organic part of their nature. "The verses of the Qur'an are not only utterances which transmit thoughts; they are also, in a sense, beings, powers, talismans. The soul of the Muslim is as it were woven out of sacred formulae; in these he works, in these he rests, in these he lives, in these he dies."[2]

The Qur'an itself may be said to hold out certain opportunities, as it were, in invitation to the illuminator. The most obvious of these are the *Sura* headings, and the divisions between the verses. In addition, indications that

five or ten verses have passed give an opportunity for a regularly repeated ornament in the margin, and the reader will find it helpful to know at what points in the text he is required to make a prostration, which can also be indicated ornamentally. It is, moreover, in the nature of things that if the opening of a *Sura* admits of illumination, the opening of the first *Sura* and therefore of the whole book should be treated with a particularly striking display of art.

Such arguments as these, however, would hardly have been able to overcome the calligraphers' scruples except on the understanding that ornamentation could, in fact, be a very positive means of heightening the effects they aimed at producing by the script. We have already seen that these effects are directly related to the nature of the Revelation itself, and it must be remembered in this connection that according to a fundamental point of doctrine, "the Qur'an is uncreated," which means, however these words be interpreted, that the revealed book constitutes no less than a Divine Presence. How does this affect Qur'an illumination? The answer is bound up with certain aspects of the Islamic perspective.

It has been said that the ancient Greeks were dominated by the idea of perfection which, with the onset of that decadence from which no civilization can escape, tended more and more to exclude other aspects of transcendence, with the eventual result that it took on the limitations of the untranscendent and finite. Now Islam is also dominated by the idea of perfection. To see this, one has only to stand in the courtyard of one of the great mosques, or in front of a prayer niche or an old city gate, not to mention examples which are closer to our theme. But Islam is also dominated by the idea of Infinitude. Perfection, *kamal,* is here imbued with the idea of Totality. "He is the First and the Last and the Outward and the Inward" (Qur'an 58:3).

One of the last *Sura*s of the Qur'an (Qur'an 112) is a definition of the Divinity, revealed in answer to a question about the nature of God. The two key Names with which it opens, *al-Ahad* and *al-Samad,* could be translated, respectively, "the Indivisible One-and-Only" and "the Totally Sufficing unto Himself in His Infinite Perfection." It is true that the definition implied by these Names is nothing other than sound metaphysics with regard to the Absolute. It is therefore universal and belongs as such to all religions. But what characterises Islam is an unwillingness to leave this highest metaphysical plane except in passing and on condition of reverting, as soon as possible, from the relative to the Absolute. The differences between religions are always on the surface and never at the roots. In other words, one religion is implicit where another is explicit, and inversely, and it is these differences of emphasis which explain the immense variety of sacred art from one orthodoxy to another.

It is well known that Islam is a monotheistic religion. Less well known are some of the corollaries of this, and for understanding Islamic art it is essential not to forget the explicitness of Islam that the Absolute One defies

not only addition and multiplication but also subtraction and division. Art in a sense depends on the Name the Outward (*al-Zahir*), yet since the One is Indivisible, the Outwardness is always one with the Inwardness. In other words, when the Qur'an says: "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the Face of God" (Qur'an 2:115), no commentator can rightly say that this verse concerns only the Outward, for it also concerns, inseparably and mysteriously, the Inward and the First and the Last.

It is the function of sacred art, in general, to be a vehicle for the Divine Presence, and it follows from what has been said that the Islamic artist will conceive this function not as a "capturing" of the Presence but rather as a "liberation"[3] of its mysterious Totality from the deceptive prison of appearances. Islam is particularly averse to any idea of circumscribing or localizing the Divine, or limiting it in any way. But totality is wholeness, and wholeness means perfection, and on the visual plane perfection cannot be reconciled with formlessness, which leaves us no alternative but contour and therefore limitation. What then is the answer? How can an art conform to a presence that is explicitly conceived as a union of qualities, when on the plane of forms these qualities are scarcely compatible?

The answer partly lies in the domain of what might be called the first sacred art of all, inasmuch as it was, for man, the first earthly vehicle of the Divine Presence, namely nature itself, and it is, moreover, the Qur'an which draws the artist's attention to this primordial "solution." There are few things that evoke more immediately the idea of perfection than a tree which has had time and space to achieve fullness of growth; and in virtue of the outward and upward pointing of its branches, it is not a closed perfection but an open one. The Qur'an uses this very symbol of itself; that is, of the "good word," being itself the best of good words: "Hast thou not seen how God coineth a similitude? A good word is as a good tree, its root firm, its branches in heaven, giving its fruits at every due season by the leave of its Lord. And God coineth similitudes for men that they may remember" (Qur'an 14:24–25). These last words bring us straight to our theme, for the truth to be remembered here, with the help of the tree as a reminder, is precisely the nonfinite nature of the Qur'an. A Qur'an recitation must not be thought of as limited to this world for it has repercussions up to the Heavens, where its "fruits" await the believer. Otherwise expressed, the Qur'an uses the symbol of the tree so that it may liberate itself from being subject, in the awareness or in the subconsciousness of the believer, to the illusion that it is just one book among other books. It may thus be said to point a way for the illuminator,[4] telling him how to set free from the finite its Infinite Presence. We need not therefore be surprised that one of the most fundamental ornaments of Qur'an illumination should be arboreal, namely the palmette, *shujayra* or "little tree,"[5] nor need we doubt that it is meant to stand for the good word. The *Sura* heading consists of the title of the *Sura,* the number of its verses, and the word *makkiyya* or *madaniyya* to show whether it was revealed in

Mecca or Medina. Written in a script deliberately different from that of the Qur'an itself, it is usually set in a wide rectangular panel, often richly framed with gold and other colors, and with an arabesque as background to the letters. This heading is prolonged into the outer margin by means of a palmette which points horizontally toward the paper's edge and which achieves for the eye the effect of a liberation of incalculable scope.[6]

The above-quoted verse of the tree is immediately concerned with man's final ends, with the celestial "fruits" of the earthly action of reciting the holy book, which is considered here above all as a power of reintegration. This aspect of the *Sura* palmette is often confirmed by an upward pointing marginal palmette which corresponds to the marginal "tree of life" in the Qur'an manuscripts of Andalusia and Northwest Africa. But the ascending movements of return cannot be considered independently of the original descent. The Qur'anic text is equally insistent upon both movements. In Arabic the word for revelation, *tanzil,* means literally "a sending down," and the reader is again and again reminded that what he is reading is no less than a Divine Message sent down directly to the Prophet.

There are three main aspects which the artist has an obligation to convey if his art is to be relevant: the Qur'an as a descending power of revelation; the Qur'an as a mysterious presence of the Infinite in the finite; and the Qur'an as an ascending power of reintegration. The tree as we experience it on earth is a symbol of the last two of these aspects, but there is one verse in which the tree may be said to point in the direction of descent: "If all the trees in the earth were pens, and if the sea eked out by seven seas more were ink, the Words of God could not be written out to the end" (Qur'an 31:27). Here the tree plays a negative part, but to be chosen for mention in this context has its positive aspect. The verse tells us, generally speaking, that earthly things are as nothing compared with what they symbolize, but at the same time it implies inescapably that the tree, for the purpose of representing heavenly implements of transcription, is a supreme symbol. One of the chapters of the Qur'an, *Surat al-Qalam* (Qur'an 68), is named after the Celestial Pen, which is also mentioned, in the very first verses revealed to the Prophet (Qur'an 96:1–5), as the instrument through which the Revelation was made.

The Prophet himself said, "The first thing God created was the pen. He created the tablet and said to the pen, 'Write !' And the pen replied, 'What shall I write?' He said, 'Write My knowledge of My creation till the day of resurrection.' Then the pen traced what had been ordained." There are thus three levels to be considered. The Qur'an as men know it is an adapted form, reduced beyond all measure, of what is written on the Tablet, which itself only refers to creation and not to God's Self-Knowledge. It is to this highest level, that of the Divine Omniscience, that "the Words of God" refer in the above-quoted Qur'anic verse. It is nonetheless an essential point of doctrine that the Qur'an as revealed to men, not to speak of the Tablet,

contains mysteriously everything, being no less than the Uncreated Word of God. We will come back later to this apparent contradiction.

From the point of view of descent, it is this instrument that the *Sura* palmette may be said to portray. Nor does this constitute a change of meaning inasmuch as the Pen, no less than its "consort" the "Guarded Tablet," is in the direct line of the descent of the Revelation and therefore virtually identical with it. It is simply a question of two directions, and the "neutral" horizontality of the palmette allows for its application to both.

The verse of the tree speaks of "its branches in Heaven." The palmette in the margin is as near to a direct illustration as this art will allow. In other words, it is a reminder that the reading or chanting of the Qur'an is the virtual starting point of a limitless vibration, a wave that ultimately breaks on the shore of Eternity, and it is above all that shore that is signified by the margin, toward which all the movement of the painting, in palmette, finial, crenellation and flow of arabesque is directed.

Another symbol which expresses both perfection and infinitude, and which is intimately, though not apparently, related to the "tree,"[7] is the rayed sun. Again and again the Qur'an refers to itself as light[8] or as being radiant with light, and many periods of Qur'an illumination can give us examples of marginal verse counts inscribed in circles whose circumferences are rayed or scalloped. The solar roundels, *shamsa* or "little sun" is used also of stellar ornaments, and occasionally replace the rosettes which divide the verses, and the rosettes themselves are often made luminous with gold. Sometimes the symbolism of light is directly combined with that of the tree, as when a solar roundel appears inside the *Sura* palmette,[9] or when the palmette itself is rounded and rayed, with its lobe replaced by an outward pointing finial. There are other variants of the same combination, and what has already been said about the two directions applies equally here, for the Revelation is not only a shining of light from the next world, but it also throws its light toward the next world by way of guidance; nor can this reversed reintegrating light be separated from the soul's spiritual aspiration, which is likewise figured by everything that points to the beyond.

Related in more ways than one to the tree are the arabesques with which the palmettes, the roundels and other marginal ornaments are filled, and which often serve as a surrounding frame for the main part of the page. Being vineal rather than arboreal, the arabesque does not by its nature point out a way, though it can give a clear indication of tendency,[10] and that is certainly one of its main functions in Qur'an illumination. At the same time, in virtue of its elusiveness, it constitutes in itself a mysterious and supraformal presence. It is also, like the tree, a vital presence and, where it is a background for the script, it serves to heighten the effect of the letters as vehicles of the Living Word. Moreover, as a portrayal of rhythm, by its constant repetition of the same motifs, in particular the small palmette, at regular intervals, it suggests rhythmic Qur'an recitations, which

take place, we are told, not only on earth but throughout all the degrees of the universe.[11]

In this context, mention must also be made of the symbolism of certain numbers and their geometrical equivalents. Nine and three, like the circle and the triangle, are worldwide symbols of Heaven, their earthly complements being the number four and the square or the rectangle. The rectangular setting of the Qur'anic text thus signifies the terrestrial state which has been penetrated by the Revelation, and in most periods we find examples of a semicircular or triangular anse attached to the outer or "beyond" side of the rectangle, or to its summit. In either case it can only be the celestial dimension of the text which is indicated. The exact architectural equivalents are in the two varieties of *qubba,* the hemispherical dome of the Eastern mosque and its pyramidal equivalent in the Maghrib.

It may be asked why, if the founders of the tradition desired certain effects, they did not use more directly imperative means. To give the impression of light, for example, why did they not surround their ornaments and the text itself with broad golden rays, instead of the delicate antenna-like finials which, though occasionally red, are more often black or brown or blue? The answer is not only that the illuminator does not wish to "raise his voice" above that of the Qur'an but also that he particularly wishes to avoid any such obviousness as might cause a premature crystallizing of the imagination and thus fatally arrest the soul from continuing to penetrate more deeply in the required direction. Inevitably, the more obvious impression of light has been attempted; analogously, there is a tenth/sixteenth-century Western Qur'an[12] in which the illuminator has replaced the palmettes by naturalistic tree branches. But such experiments merely serve to make one appreciate all the more the subtle and incalculable power of the traditional stylised symbol, which the craftsman has only to follow, "blindly" or not, as the case may be.

It must also be remembered that the whole purpose of illumination is to recall the higher or deeper dimension of the text. The relationship between the "hidden book" and the fully revealed Qur'an is one of majesty to beauty, of contraction, or reserve, to expansion, and, however, paradoxical it may seem, illumination, being there to remind us of the "hidden book," has an overall function of majesty in relation to the beauty of the text. This holds true[13] even when the illumination is at its most beautiful and when the text is written in a particularly majestic style.

Color is used toward the same ends as form. Gold was the initial element, and after a short period of fluctuation, that is, by the middle of the tenth century CE, blue had been given a marked precedence over both green and red, and it was soon raised to the level of parity with gold in the East, whereas in the West, gold retained its original supremacy with blue as secondary. The importance of these two colors can be gauged by the fact that whatever extra pigments might be added, it was nearly always in a subordinate capacity. Moreover, in almost every style and age, one is likely to find a Qur'an in

which the illuminations consist exclusively of blue and gold, and this same exclusiveness is liable to be a feature of certain pages in any Qur'an even where polychrome illuminations are to be found on other pages.

Blue is the color of the Infinite, which is identical with Mercy, for "My Mercy embraceth all things" (Qur'an 7:156). The great symbol of this Infinitude is the all-surrounding sky. The relevant Divine Name, *al-Rahman,* the first of the two Names of Mercy, has been well translated "the Infinitely Good," for it expresses the essential "roots" of Mercy. At this level, mercy, revelation, and religion are one. We have here what might be called the "feminine" aspect of Providence[14] or more precisely the "maternal" aspect. Thus the supreme archetype of Revelation is termed the "Mother of the Book" (Qur'an 13:39) and in this connection it may be noted that the most simple word formed from those letters which have the basic meaning of mercy, *ra', ha', mim,* is *rahim,* "womb."[15] Closely related to *al-Rahman* is the Name *al-Muhit,* the All-Embracing, and by extension, the word *muhit* also means "ocean."[16]

As a symbol of Infinite Mercy, the sea is, in fact, second only to the sky itself, whose color it takes and assimilates, and in particular connection with the All-Embracing, another feature of Qur'an illumination must be mentioned; so prevalent that many have suspected a "superstition," namely the use of blue for the outermost edge, both in individual ornaments and where there is a border to the text. One has the impression of an unwritten law that blue must have the last word, and enough has been said to make it clear why such a circumscription is no limitation.

If blue liberates by Infinitude, gold liberates because, like the sun, it is a symbol of the Spirit and therefore virtually transcends the whole world of forms. Gold, by its very nature, "escapes" from form to the point that a calligrapher writing in gold has to outline his letters with black in order to make them formally effective. As the color of light, gold is, like yellow, intrinsically a symbol of knowledge. Extrinsically, it means teaching or manifestation. Blue in the presence of gold is therefore Mercy inclined to reveal itself.

This brings us to the second Name of Mercy, *al-Rahim,* which signifies Mercy manifested and which we translate "the All-Merciful" since linguistically it is an intensive form of *rahim,* merciful, though less intensive than the name which precedes it. If it be asked why the illuminators did not revert from blue to green,[17] which is the color of Mercy manifested (being the result of the mixture of the colors of intrinsic mercy and of light), it might be answered that the Qur'anic text itself takes the place of green. This is no reason why green should not make a parallel appearance. But in his overall fidelity to blue, which takes religion back to its first origins, the illuminator assents to a typically Islamic ellipsis whereby the whole process of revelation is as it were folded back into its principle, with nothing between primary cause and ultimate effect. Islam loves to dwell on the roots of things; the chapter that is named after the "cause" in question, *Surat al-Rahman,*

begins with an ellipsis in the opposite direction: "The Infinitely Good taught the Qur'an" (Qur'an 55:1–2). To say that blue and gold are the equivalents of the subject and the verb of this sentence is to sum up all that has so far been said about color in Qur'an illumination.

Blue and gold are opposite enough to enhance each other greatly. But in the triple domain of primary color, perfect balance cannot come by two, but only by three. To take two of the colors and to leave out the third or to reduce it to being a mere auxiliary means that the scales will necessarily be tipped one way or another, but this can be a way of gaining or heightening a required effect. Gold has the exaltation to balance the depth of blue, but not being a hot color, its mere warmth does not level out the coldness of blue. The resulting overall coolness does much to contribute to the total effect of holiness.[18]

Of all the features of illumination so far touched on, fine examples are to be found considerably before the close of the thirteenth century. That date is mentioned here chiefly because it marks the end of an era, or more precisely because the end which had in fact taken place some 50 years previously had time by the turn of the century to make itself felt in the domain of art. Moreover, for reasons not unconnected with what brought the era to a close, the year 700/1300 or thereabouts forms a kind of barrier on the far side of which Qur'an manuscripts are relatively rare. Inestimable treasures must have been destroyed by the Mongol invaders who sacked Baghdad[19] in 1258, perhaps even more than had already been destroyed in the course of the Crusades. But, as if by compensation, the new era seems to have brought with it a fresh impetus, which had its effect on Qur'an calligraphy.

NOTES

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1. Particularly important is Richard Ettinghausen's "Manuscript Illumination" in *A Survey of Persian Art,* vol. III (London, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1939), 1937–1974.

2. Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1998), 60.

3. We are here at the very roots of the question, and it may be inferred from this that the relative absence of the "living" figural element in all the central arts of Islam has causes which are far more profound and more positive than is generally supposed.

4. It goes without saying that this reference here is not to every artist or craftsman but to the small minority of "founder-artists" whoever they may have been. Once the tradition had been established it would simply have been followed, with more or less

understanding but without question, by generation after generation. Nor does this chapter claim, by putting certain trains of thought into the minds of its readers, to reproduce the mental processes of the pioneers themselves. Inspiration tends to fold up thought, and all that the following paragraphs can presume to do is to note some of the more obvious relevancies of Qur'an illumination to the Book it illuminates, in the knowledge that sacred art is providentially, by definition, the most strictly relevant art in the world. It would be beside the point and void of interest to say that such and such an artisan may well not have had some particular intention or other. At this artistic level, any correspondence that strikes the intelligence of one who contemplates the work in question is the proof of an intention *in divinis*.

5. There are two main varieties of this symbol; the heavier and more complicated form with its cumbersome protruding petals or wings had a period of ascendancy, fortunately never exclusive, from the ninth to the eleventh centuries CE. But it was eventually superseded altogether by the simpler and more stylised palmette which is incomparably the more effective, and which itself may be subdivided into two varieties according to whether its roundness be suddenly or gradually tapered to its lobe.

6. The importance of this ornament is tragically demonstrated whenever, as is all too often the case, a binder in trimming the pages of an old manuscript has trimmed away the lobes of the palmettes. How little has been lost, and yet how much!

7. For this relationship, see René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross* (London, U.K.: Luzac, 1958), 52; and Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype* (Cambridge, U.K.: Quinta Essentia, 1997), 90–94.

8. For example, "We have sent down to you a clear light" (Qur'an 4:174) and "We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will" (Qur'an 42:52).

9. These luminous palmettes are suggestive of another Qur'anic tree, the one that feeds the lamp that is the symbol of the Divine Light of which the Qur'an itself is an aspect: "a sacred olive tree that is neither of the East nor of the West; its oil well-nigh blazeth in splendour though the fire hath not touched it" (Qur'an 24:35).

10. As is found in the powerfully extroverted arabesque.

11. The Qur'an mentions the angels as reciting its verses (Qur'an 37:3). For a profound and relevant comment on this passage, see René Guénon, "The Language of the Birds," in *Fundamental Symbols* (Cambridge, U.K.: Quinta Essentia, 1995), 39.

12. 1522 in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. See A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Illuminated* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1967), plate 47.

13. It could almost be said that when it ceases to hold true, this is the beginning of decadence.

14. This manner of speaking must not be taken too exclusively since truth and wisdom belong to this aspect and blue is one of their symbols, but they cannot be called specifically "feminine." See also the author's chapter on "The Symbolism of the Triad of Primary Colours," in *Symbol and Archetype* (Cambridge, U.K.: Quinta Essentia, 1997).

15. Not unanalogous is the iconographical connection in Christianity between the color blue and the Virgin Mary, who may be considered as the supreme human manifestation of the principle in question.

16. Also relevant is the connection, we might almost say symbolic identity in certain respects, between Mary and the sea.

17. Astrologically, the color blue corresponds to the planet Jupiter, "the greater benefic," and green to Venus, "the lesser benefic," and there is a certain analogy between these two principles and the two Names of Mercy *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*.

18. The phrase "coolness of the eyes" means "delight" in Arabic and is especially connected with the joys of Paradise. But needless to say, red is also related to spiritual joy, and sometimes, especially in the Islamic West, the illumination on a page is almost entirely red and gold, but here also the outermost edges are blue.

19. For just over 500 years, since 750 CE, Baghdad had been the cultural and administrative center of the Islamic world, but after 34 days of destruction it never reached this status again. Nonetheless, Islam was able to absorb its conquerors.

8

Art and Liturgy

Titus Burckhardt

THE NATURE AND ROLE OF SACRED ART

In speaking of Islamic worship in relation to art, we used the term "liturgy," and this needs further definition because it evokes *a priori* the Christian pattern of worship, which developed gradually on the basis of an apostolic tradition and by the work of the Church Fathers. In this context, the liturgy is distinguished from the sacrament, the divinely instituted rite which, in a way, the liturgy enfolds, protecting it and at the same time manifesting it, while being itself protected and unfolded by sacred art which transposes its themes into architecture and iconography, to mention only the two most important visual arts in the *milieu* of Christianity. Things present themselves quite differently in Islam, where the forms of worship are fixed, down to the smallest detail, by the Qur'an and the Prophet's example. There is practically no liturgical borderline, so that one can say equally that the liturgy is comprised within the rite itself, that is, in the form of worship divinely instituted or, again, that sacred art assumes the role of the liturgy, and that this role consists of creating a framework to suit the rite, open to "angelic blessings" and closed to dark psychic influences. We shall see that such is indeed the role and position of art in Islam, and it immediately explains the importance assumed in this context by religious architecture and even by architecture in general—since every dwelling is in principle a place of worship—as well as by every other art that serves to shape the environment, such as decoration, epigraphy, and the art of carpets, not forgetting the liturgical role of clothing.

Sacred art therefore fulfills two mutually complementary functions: it radiates the beauty of the rite and, at the same time, protects it. The first of these functions is legitimized in Islam by the fact that the Prophet advised his companions to chant the Qur'an, that is, to recite it in rhythmic and melodious fashion. Thus, the revealed word reverberates in the

musical order, and this is assuredly the firmest possible link between rite and art.

The notion that worship should be accompanied by beauty and, as it were, enwrapped in it is also confirmed by these passages from the Qur'an: "Oh sons of Adam! wear your comely garments in every place of prayer...who then has declared unlawful the comely garb that God has brought forth for His servants...?" (Qur'an 7:31–32). We shall return later to the liturgical role of clothing.

The complementary function of sacred art, that of protection, is illustrated by the traditional story (*hadith*) in which the Prophet is said to have had a cloth or curtain, which was decorated with figured designs, removed from his room because, he said, these figures disturbed his prayers. Now the Prophet certainly did not lack the power of abstract concentration, but he wished thereby to show that certain forms of art are incompatible with Islamic worship. It must not be said that he was condemning art as such, as if the rejection of certain forms did not necessarily call forth others, for we live in a world woven out of forms and we cannot avoid choosing among them.

In a certain sense, a rite is a divine art. For those who balk at this way of expressing things, let us make clear that we mean by this a manifestation, on the level of forms and according to a specifically human mode, of a reality that itself goes beyond all forms or limitations. This art cannot therefore be imitated, but it radiates; we could also say that it reverberates and needs surroundings to echo in.

The term "mosque," which applies to every Muslim place of prayer, comes from the Arabic *masjid* which means a "place of prostration," and this shows implicitly that canonical prayer in Islam involves certain bodily gestures or positions.

There is nothing surprising in the body's being required to share in the act of adoration, when it is remembered that this act engages man in his totality—he must pray with his whole being and his whole awareness—and that this totality is conceived empirically only from the starting point of the body. The body's integration into prayer demands its sacralization, and this is effected in the ablution preceding the prayer; to bring the limbs into contact with water, an image of primordial in-differentiation, serves moreover, by analogy and according to intention, as a kind of restoration to the state of innocence.

Let us note parenthetically that there is a link between the sacralization of the body, as realized by ritual purifications, and the Islamic conception of sexuality.

The chief positions or attitudes of prayer are the following: the upright position facing the *qibla,* in which the worshipper recites the words of prayer revealed in the Qur'an; then bowing and prostration. The significance of these three attitudes, which are linked in a sequence of movements and

repose to the accompaniment of sacred utterances, is clear: it is in the upright position, which distinguishes man from all other animals, that the believer speaks to God, or that God speaks through him; bowing is an act of homage by the servant to what surpasses him, while prostration is the abandonment of oneself to the will of an all-powerful Lord. These three attitudes describe in space the directional segments of a cross, which esoteric science identifies with what might be termed the ‘‘existential dimensions’’ of man, namely, active and ‘‘upright’’ participation in the spirit which transcends the natural world, the unfolding of consciousness into the ‘‘horizontal’’ of existence, and, finally, the creature’s movement away from its divine source, a downward fall for which submission to the Divine Will compensates.

The actualization of these dimensions is equivalent to reintegrating them into ‘‘Adamic’’ equilibrium. And it is this equilibrium, by virtue of which man is all and nothing before God, which confers on Islamic art its plentitude, sobriety, and serenity.

THE *MIHRAB*

The prayer niche, or *mihrab,* is indisputably a creation of sacred art and has become in practice a regular element in the liturgy, though not an indispensable one. Art historians believe that this element was introduced into mosque architecture in the time of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid and, more exactly, when this caliph rebuilt the mosque of the Prophet at Medina. But it is extremely probable that the niche replaced a more simple form, such as a false door, which showed the direction of Mecca in primitive mosques. If the *mihrab* in the cave beneath the rock of the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-Sakhra*) at Jerusalem goes back to the years during which this sanctuary was built (691–692 CE), it is an example of this. This *mihrab* consists of an arch on small columns, carved in relief on a slab of marble. At the level of the capitals, there is a very simple inscription in Kūfi script across the back: the two Muslim declarations of faith. In the center of the background is a rosette with eight petals. An even simpler indication of the *qibla* must have existed in the ancient mosque at Medina; according to certain accounts, a stone slab marked the spot where the Prophet stood to lead the communal prayers.

The form of the niche may well have been suggested by the example of the apse in Coptic churches, or even by that of the liturgical niches in certain synagogues,[1] but these are no more than ‘‘incidental causes’’; what matters is that the sacred niche derives from a worldwide symbolism, and that this symbolism is implicitly confirmed by the Qur’an.

Its very shape, with its vault corresponding to heaven and its piedroit to the earth, makes the niche a consistent image of the ‘‘cave of the world.’’ The cave of the world is the ‘‘place of appearance’’ (*mazhar*) of the Divinity,

whether it be a case of the outward world as a whole or the inner world, the sacred cave of the heart. All oriental traditions recognize the significance of this, and the exedra of Roman basilicas is simply a worldly version of it, with the emperor replacing the Divinity.[2]

To establish the symbolism of the *mihrab* in its Islamic perspective, it must be related to its Qur'anic context. The word literally means, "refuge"; the Qur'an in particular uses this word to describe a secret place in the Temple at Jerusalem where the Holy Virgin entered into a spiritual retreat and was nourished by angels. It is identified by certain Arab commentators with the Holy of Holies, the *debir* of the Temple at Jerusalem, and this interpretation, which does not appear to take into account the Judaic laws governing access to the *debir,* accords in fact with the Patristic tradition and the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church.[3] The inscriptions round the arch of the *mihrab* are frequently such as to recall the Qur'anic story in question, especially in Turkish mosques, starting with the *mihrab* of the Hagia Sophia, thereby confirming its dedication to the Holy Virgin. The link between the *mihrab* and Sayyidatna Maryam (Our Lady Mary) leads us again to the analogy between the prayer niche and the heart: it is in the heart that the virgin-soul takes refuge to invoke God; as for the nourishment miraculously bestowed there, it corresponds to grace.

The form of the *mihrab*—discounting its name—calls to mind another passage from the Qur'an, the "Verse of Light," where the Divine Presence in the world or in the heart of man is compared to a light from a lamp placed in a niche (*mishkat*): "God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The symbol of His light is a niche wherein is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass, and this glass is as a radiant star. [The light] is nourished by a blessed olive tree, which is neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would all but glow though fire touch it not. Light upon light. God guideth to His Light whom He will, and God striketh symbols for man, and God knoweth all things" (Qur'an 24:35). The analogy between the *mihrab* and the *mishkat* is clear; it is emphasized, moreover, by hanging a lamp before the prayer niche.

Many of the oldest prayer niches are adorned with a canopy in the form of a seashell. This motif is already found in Hellenistic art, but it would not have been incorporated into the art of Islam unless it had a spiritual significance; the shell is associated with the pearl, which is one of the Islamic symbols of the Divine Word, according to a saying of the Prophet, the world was created from a white pearl. The seashell enclosing the pearl is like the "ear" of the heart receiving the Divine Utterance; it is, in fact, in the *mihrab* that this utterance is made.

It may seem surprising that a form such as the *mihrab,* which is, after all, simply an accessory to the liturgy, should be the focus of a particularly rich and profound symbolism. But this is implicit proof of the link between sacred art and esoterism, the "science of the inward" (*'ilm al-batin*). It is on this same plane that the somewhat Christian typology of the prayer niche is

situated; it is in Islamic esoterism that certain Christly themes reappear, not in their historical or dogmatic content, but as patterns of the contemplative life.

THE *MINBAR*

The Arabic term *al-jamiʿ*, which means literally "what brings together," refers to a mosque where the Friday prayers are celebrated together. The term has sometimes been translated "cathedral mosque," since, as a general rule, it is only mosques of this order which have a *cathedra,* a pulpit, called *minbar* in Arabic. The question remains to what extent the *minbar* corresponds to a bishop's chair, or even to a king's throne. Actually, it is neither the one nor the other, or it is both at the same time, since it is in some way an image of the Prophet's function and then of the function of his Caliphs, and thus unites in itself both spiritual authority and temporal power.

The prototype of the *minbar* is a sort of stepped stool which the Prophet used in his mosque at Medina to talk to the assembled faithful. According to certain traditional authorities, this stool had three levels. The Prophet sat on the third level and rested his feet on the second. After him, Abu Bakr, the first caliph, sat on the second level and rested his feet on the first. ʿUmar, the second caliph, took his seat on the first level and placed his feet on the ground. The hierarchical sense of the levels is clear.

According to other sources, the original *minbar* at Medina had six steps. The oldest surviving *manabir* (plural of *minbar*) have from seven to eleven steps, and this multiplication of levels is easily explained by the custom which requires the *imam* to preach his Friday sermon from one of the *minbar's* lower levels. He stands up to speak, head and shoulders covered in a white cloth and a staff in his hand. Between the two canonical sections of the sermon, exhortation of the faithful and praise of the Prophet, he sits briefly on the nearest step. The upper steps of the *minbar,* and in particular the top one, which is adorned with a headboard in the manner of a throne, are left empty; they recall the preeminent function of the Prophet.

The overall shape of the *minbar* bespeaks the continuity of tradition; it always takes the form of a staircase, fairly narrow and nearly always enclosed by handrails. Since the Seljuk period, this simple structure has been supplemented by a canopy sheltering the topmost level and by a doorway at the foot of the stairs. These additions have simply accentuated the *minbar*'s symbolism, which corresponds to the ladder of the worlds—the most broadly spaced levels are the corporeal world, the psychic world, and the world of pure spirit—and to the throne as a "polar" station. None of these points of significance was added later; they result logically from the first action of the Prophet in choosing a stool with three steps to preside over the assembled believers.

The fact that the uppermost level of the *minbar,* the throne sheltered by its canopy, remains empty, is strangely reminiscent of the awaiting throne that, in

both Buddhism and Christianity, represents the unseen presence of the *Logos* or of the *Tathagatha* or, in other terms, the unseen presence of the Divine Messenger. But this is certainly not a case of an influence coming from outside Islam, but of a coincidence due to the universal character of symbolism.

TOMBS

That a great many mausoleums are found in Islamic lands is something of a paradox, for the glorification of the dead is foreign to the spirit of Islam. ''The most beautiful tomb,'' said the Prophet, ''is one that vanishes from the face of the earth''; and the Qur'an says ''All who are upon it [the earth] are fleeting, and there abides only the face of thy Lord full of majesty and generosity'' (Qur'an 55:26–27). This paradox is explicable by two factors that are in a way ineluctable, the first of which is the ambition of sovereigns to perpetuate their names; implying as it does a wish for personal glory, this ambition is perhaps not altogether Islamic but it is, after all, fairly natural and it is made legitimate by the hope that the soul of the deceased shall benefit from the prayers offered up for it by the visitors to the tomb. The second factor closely follows the first and consists of the wish of the community of believers to honor the saints, whom they see as the true kings of the earth as much as, or more than, princes. The proliferation of princely mausoleums coincides historically with the coming to power of the Seljuks who, perhaps, retained and transposed the funeral customs of their Central Asian ancestors, for their tombs greatly resemble ceremonial *yourts.* In the same period, that is, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the general veneration of saints, among both people and sovereigns, reached its definitive form with the organization of Sufism—the mysticism of Islam—into orders or brotherhoods, each with its chain of founding or renovating masters. The Muslim saint (*wali*) is nearly always a contemplative whose state of spiritual perfection finds permanent expression in the teaching bequeathed to his disciples. To this bequest, to a greater or lesser degree esoteric, there is generally superadded the spontaneous veneration of the people, and it is this that affects his ''canonization,'' and not some ecclesiastical institution. We have no hesitation in translating the Arabic term *wali Allah,* literally ''friend of God,'' by the word ''saint,'' for what is understood by the one term as much as by the other is a man who has become the object and instrument of a divine grace. What is sought at the tomb of a *wali* is his *baraka,* his ''blessing'' or spiritual influence, which remains active and is in a way linked with the corporeal remains of a man who was in life a recipient, as it were, of the Divine Presence. Moreover, the saint is not thought of as being dead, but as mysteriously alive, according to this passage from the Qur'an: ''Say not of them that were killed in the path of God that they are dead; they are alive, but ye perceive not'' (Qur'an 2:154). This verse refers in its most immediate sense to those

who fall in the holy war, and many of the tombs venerated are in fact *martyria* (*mashahid*), burial places of those who fought against the enemies of Islam. But since the Prophet described the struggle against the passions of the soul as "the greatest holy war" (*al-jihad al-akbar*), this verse applies *a priori* to all those who have sacrificed their lives to the contemplation of God. The veneration of saints is, moreover, a kind of reflection of the veneration accorded to the Prophet, whose tomb at Medina is second as a place of pilgrimage only to the sanctuary of Mecca.

Whereas the mausoleums of princes were usually built by the persons who expected to repose in them, those of saints were the gift either of their disciples or of sovereigns, like the famous tomb of Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri built by the Emperor Akbar, or of the nameless common people.

Besides the mausoleums of princes and the tombs of saints, there are the funerary monuments dedicated to descendants of the Prophet. Their architectural forms give all these monuments an equal dignity; the mausoleum of a great conqueror like Tamerlane is simply a glorification of God, and the tomb of one of "God's poor" often stands as a token of homage to his spiritual kingship.

The interior of a mausoleum generally contains a cenotaph indicating the spot where the deceased is buried, or laid to rest, in a crypt of indeterminate depth. There is also a *mihrab* showing the direction of Mecca, but so placed that persons at prayer shall not face the tomb.

Mausoleums of princes are occasionally grouped around the tomb of a saint in such a way as to constitute, together with all the more humble graves that come to be placed near by, veritable "cities of the dead" like the necropolis of Shah-i-Zindah ("The Living King") at Samarqand or that of the Mamluk tombs at Cairo. These "cities of the dead" have nothing mournful or sad about them; as in all Muslim cemeteries, the dominant note is serenity.

There is one architectural formula that has come to be most prevalently used for relatively simple mausoleums, namely, the cube crowned with a cupola, the transition between the two usually being mediated by a polygon. Funerary buildings of this sober form predominate in Muslim cemeteries and rise as landmarks on the edges of the desert and the seacoasts from the Atlantic to India. Often whitened with lime, they attract the eye from afar and hold it by their image of an equilibrium that reconciles heaven with earth.

THE ART OF APPAREL

We have alluded to the liturgical role of clothing. Let us make clear that there are no priestly vestments in Islam because, properly speaking, there is no priesthood; but neither is there any clothing that is Muslim and profane. What determines Muslim costume in general is first of all the *Sunna,* the

example given by the Prophet, and second, the fact that clothing must suit the movements and positions of the prescribed prayers. It is in this latter respect that Imam Malik condemns clothing that clings to the body; in fact the traditional clothing of all Muslim peoples is distinguished by its ample cut; it conceals the body, or part of the body, at the same time as adapting itself to the body's movements.

The example given by the Prophet amounts to no more than a few guidelines that permit a great deal of liberty in the art of dress, while indicating the limits set, on the one hand, by spiritual poverty and, on the other, by the dignity of the *Imam,* which pertains in principle to every Muslim of male sex and mature years. It is known that the Prophet took the occasion to wear clothes of various colors and various places of origin as if to demonstrate that Islam would spread to different ethnic surroundings; however, he preferred white and rejected excessively sumptuous materials, while insisting on the need for certain of his Companions to mark their rank and standing in the community. He forbade men to wear gold ornaments or silken robes, reserving these for women. Gold is by its nature sacred, and Islam reserves it for the domain which is, for Islam, *sacratum (haram) par excellence,* that of woman, conjugal love, and family life sheltered from all public gaze.

It is fashionable to question the authenticity of traditions extolling the wearing of the turban. Now whether the saying "the turban is the crown of Islam" is the word of the Prophet or not, this saying is, in any case, expressive of the inherent significance of this item of manly apparel, which proclaims both the majesty of the believer who is "God's representative on earth" and his submission (*islam*) to God's will. In the Semitic environment, it is always a token of reverential fear to keep the head covered, no doubt because to expose it to the sun is symbolically equivalent to exposing it to the divine rigor. It may well be suggested that the turban became an integral part of Muslim costume because it was worn by the Arabian Bedouins, but this is not proved nor, for that matter, does it disprove our point. It was only natural that Arab costume should have been spread by the Islamic conquests, but the positive value of this phenomenon lies in the simple fact that the Prophet had taken over certain Arabian and Bedouin customs, rectifying them and transposing them into a spiritual ordinance. It is extremely probable that loosely cut garments, which are eminently suitable for the desert climate with its extremes of temperature, are of Arab origin, and one can be certain that garments of very simple cut like the *'aba'a,* or the seamless *ha'ik* that covers the head and shoulders, are of nomadic origin. It is perhaps the Maghribi costume—a long tunic, a rectangular robe with or without sleeves, burnous, and turban wrapped in a *litham*—that constitutes the most typically Arab and Muslim style, for it sits equally well on the scholar of Islamic sciences, the warrior chief, and the man of the people. Its beauty and dignity are at one with its simplicity. In the Islamic East, Turkish and Mongol influences are responsible for a greater diversity in forms of dress, which, however, are never

incompatible with the general Islamic style of apparel; a host of Muslim pilgrims from the most diverse countries is always recognizably a host of Muslims.

We are considering masculine garb in particular, for women's dress has far less unity since it is made for life at home, and women go veiled in the streets. Feminine garb is happy to hold on to certain items of a regional character and to retain occasional forms of apparel of great antiquity, such as the robe made from a single piece of unstitched cloth, draped around the body and held together by two clasps at the shoulders, which is found in particular among certain tribes in the Sahara.

Men's garb in Islamic countries makes for the effacement of social differences, with the exception of certain extravagances of dress deriving either from princely courts or, again, from groups of ascetics who have cut themselves off from the world. These latter may well follow the example of the Prophet, who occasionally wore a robe made up of pieces of cloth stitched together.

The art of apparel is made all the more important in Islamic countries by the absence of any human image; it is the art of clothing that in a way conveys the Muslim's ideal image of himself as a Muslim. There is, moreover, no art that has a more telling effect on a man's soul than that of clothing, for a man instinctively identifies himself with the clothes he wears. It is vain to say that "the habit does not make the monk"; in a certain sense there is no monk without an appropriate habit.

The art of clothing is an essentially collective one; it is therefore subject to fluctuations and obeys, to some degree or other, the psychological law referred to by Ibn Khaldun, according to which conquered people imitate the manners and clothing of their conquerors. Despite this, Muslim dress shows such historical and geographical continuity that one can attribute it only to that positive quality of the *Umma,* the religious collectivity, which moved the Prophet to say "my community will never be single-minded in error."

The gradual disappearance of traditional Muslim costume in favor of modern European dress can be only partly explained by the law of psychology referred to above. This form of "acculturation" does amount to imitating the man who holds in his hands the means of power and success, and modern European clothing has become the emblem of material efficiency. At the same time, a more acute change of direction in the soul is involved. There is a turning away from a way of life entirely dominated by contemplative values with its bearings fixed on the hereafter; the aim is to be in the "here and now," on the level of newspaper events. Modern European dress is welcome in such a perspective, because it expresses individualism, an attitude that stands outside all that is sacred, in the same way as egalitarianism has nothing in common with the self-effacement of the Muslim within the *Umma,* but represents a leveling down, a negation of any *élite,* whether of nobility or saints.

One could well believe that modern European dress had been expressly invented to destroy the patterns of Muslim life; it makes the ablutions prescribed by the Qur'an difficult and directly impedes the movements and positions of the canonical prayer by its stiff folds. If it is not within its power to destroy the inner value of these rites, it detracts nonetheless from the radiation of their value by the unavoidable triviality of its associations.

The teaching that inheres in the traditional apparel of Islam is, in sum, that the human body, created "according to the form" of God, is a kind of revelation. This is true of man as he was before the Fall, and still is in virtuality, although he bears the marks of his decadence upon him, which love alone forgives. Thus, it is fitting that the body should be veiled at least in part, but not that it should have forms imposed on it that are not its own. To veil the body is not to deny it, but to withdraw it like gold, into the domain of things concealed from the eyes of the crowd.

NOTES

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1. For example, a sacred niche in the underground necropolis of Mea Shearim, which is very like a *mihrab.*

2. In Hindu iconography also, divine appearances are usually surrounded by an arch representing the cosmos.

3. According to this tradition, Zacharias took Mary as a child into the Holy of Holies because he recognized that she was herself the holy tabernacle.

9

Music and Spirituality in Islam

Jean-Louis Michon

A CONTROVERSIAL QUESTION

"Oh Lord, Show us things as they are!" asked the Prophet Muhammad when addressing himself to his Lord.[1] The same prayer was to be repeated over and over by devout Muslims desiring to objectively judge a more or less ambiguous situation. It is therefore well placed at the beginning of a chapter on the art of music, as it was understood and is still understood in the countries of *Dar al-Islam*. Few subjects have been as debated or have raised as many contradictory emotions and opinions as the status (*hukm*) of music *vis-à-vis* the religious Law at the heart of Muslim society. In fact, the debate is not yet over and, no doubt, never will be because it concerns a domain in which it seems that Providence wanted to give Muslims the greatest possible freedom of choice and appreciation. No Qur'anic prescription explicitly aims at music. The *Sunna*, the Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, cites only anecdotal elements, none of which constitutes a peremptory argument either for or against musical practice. The third source of Islamic law, the opinions of the doctors of the law (*ulama*), spokesmen recognized by social consensus, varies widely, ranging from the categorical condemnation of music to its panegyric, while passing through various degrees of acceptance and reservation.

To understand how such divergent positions could have arisen and been expressed on this subject in Islamic thought and ethics, it is useful to refer to those interpreters who knew how to take into consideration ideas that were at once metaphysical, philosophical, or theosophical, as well as the imperatives of Muslim ethics, both individual and social. To this category belong the "Brethren of Purity" (*Ikhwan al-Safa'*), whose vast encyclopedia of philosophy, science, and art, compiled in the tenth century CE, contains a precious "Epistle on Music."[2]

Like the Greek philosophers, the Ikhwan al-Safa' recognized in terrestrial music the echo of the music of the spheres, "inhabited by the angels of

God and by the elite of his servants.'' ''The rhythm produced by the motion of the musician evokes for certain souls residing in the world of generation and corruption the felicity of the world of the spheres, in the same way that the rhythms produced by the motion of the spheres and the stars evoke for souls, who are the beatitude of the world of the spirit.'' By reason of the law of harmony, which reigns over all the planes of existence, linking them according to an order at once hierarchical and analogical, ''the caused beings belonging to secondary reactions imitate in their modalities the first beings, which are their causes...from which it must be deduced that the notes of terrestrial music necessarily imitate those of celestial music.'' Like [the Greek philosopher] Pythagoras, who ''heard, thanks to the purity of the substance of his soul and the wisdom of his heart, the music produced by the rotation of the spheres and the stars,'' and who ''was the first to have spoken of this science,'' other philosophers such as Nichomus, Ptolemy, and Euclid had ''the habit of singing, with percussive sounds produced by chords, words and measured verses that were composed for exhortation to the spiritual life and described the delights of the world of the spirit, the pleasure and the happiness of its inhabitants.'' Later came the Muslim conquerors who, when given the signal to attack, recited verses of the Qur'an or declaimed Arabic or Persian poems describing the paradisal delights reserved for those who died while fighting on the path of God. When resorting to music, when inventing the principles of its melodies and the constitution of its rhythms, the sages had no other goal than ''to soften hardened hearts, to wake the negligent souls from their sleep of forgetfulness and the misguided spirits from their slumber of ignorance, to make them desire the spiritual world, their luminous place and their journey of life, to make them leave the world of generation and corruption, to save them from submersion in the ocean of the material world and to deliver them from the prison of nature.''

How, under such circumstances, can it be explained that music could become an object of reprobation? Because, explain the Ikhwan, even if music is good in itself, it can be turned aside from its natural and legitimate ends: ''As for the reason for the interdiction of music in certain laws of the prophets...it relates to the fact that people do not use music for the purpose assigned to it by the philosophers, but for the purpose of diversion, for sport, for the incitement to enjoy the pleasures of this lower world.'' Thus, that which can become reprehensible is not music itself but the use to which certain people put it. ''Be watchful while listening to music, so that the appetites of the animal soul do not push you toward the splendor of nature. Nature will lead you astray from the paths of salvation and prevent you from discourse with the Superior Soul.''[3] This warning issued by the Ikhwan goes along with the teaching given a century earlier by the Sufi Dhu'l-Nun the Egyptian (d. 861 CE): ''Listening (*sama'*) is a divine influence that stirs the heart to see Allah; those who listen to music spiritually attain to Allah, whereas

those who listen to it sensually fall into heresy.''[4] In the same way, the Sufi 'Ali Hujwiri (d. 1071 CE) wrote in his *Kashf al-mahjub* (The Lifting of the Veil), ''Listening to sweet sounds produces an effervescence of the substance molded in man; true, if the substance be true, false, if the substance be false.''[5]

Such was, generally speaking, the attitude of the philosophers and theoreticians of music, as well as that of the majority of Sufis and a good number of canonists. Aware of the benefits of the art of music, they did not show themselves less circumspect as to its utilization, distinguishing between noble and vulgar genres, and between sensual melodies, ''useful'' melodies, and the like.[6]

However, numerous jurists went much further and, seeing the sensual usage that could be made of the practice of music, concluded that music itself was evil or at least that it involved more disadvantages than advantages and had, therefore, to be banned from society. Poetry that was sung and the use of instruments gave rise, they said, to corrupting excitations of the soul, which turned the individual aside from his religious duties, encouraged one to seek out sensual satisfactions and bad company, and pushed one into drunkenness and debauchery. Such jurists went so far as to say that the public singer, even if he or she sings the Qur'an to arouse pleasure in his listeners, could not be heard as a legal witness. They also maintained that it was lawful to break musical instruments.

For the jurist and moralist Ibn Abi al-Dunya (d. 894 CE), who wrote a short treatise on the ''Censure of Instruments of Diversion'' (*dhamm al-malahi*), singing and music were condemnable distractions of the same type as the games of chess and backgammon.[7] Later, the Hanbalite jurist Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201 CE) was to show himself to be just as severe *vis-à-vis* music, which evil human nature, ''the soul which incites to evil'' (*al-nafs al-ammara bi al-su'),* according to the Qur'an (Qur'an 12:53), has a tendency to seize upon in order to anchor man in sensuality. ''The spiritual concert (*sama'*) includes two things,'' he wrote in *Talbis Iblis* (The Dissimulation of the Devil). ''In the first place, it leads the heart away from reflection upon the power of God and from assiduity in His service. In the second place, it encourages enjoyment of the pleasures of this world.'' Furthermore, ''Music makes man forget moderation and it troubles his mind. This implies that man, when he is excited, commits acts that he judges reprehensible in others when he is in his normal state. He makes movements with his head, claps his hands, strikes the ground with his feet, and commits acts similar to those of the insane. Music leads one to this; its action appears to be like that of wine, because it clouds the mind. This is why it is necessary to prohibit it.''[8]

Ibn al-Jawzi admits, however, that there are certain musical genres in which the emotional element does not enter and that, therefore, are legal, such as the songs of pilgrims traveling to Mecca, the songs of fighters for the faith, and the songs of camel drivers. He also recognized that in the previous epoch in which the jurist Ibn Hanbal lived (ninth century CE), poems

were sung that exalted only religious feeling and that, consequently, escaped interdiction. But such times, according to him, are over and the innovations introduced since then in music and poetry are such that these arts can only have a deleterious influence.

THE PHILOSOPHER-MUSICOLOGISTS

Although they must be regarded as admissible on the part of jurists concerned above all with the moral health of the common man and the collectivity, arguments of the sort made by Ibn al-Jawzi cannot be held as applying to those seekers of Truth who have sufficiently refined themselves so as not to fall into the trap of sensuality. These are people for whom music occupies an important place in the hierarchy of the arts and the sciences, and who consider and practice it as a discipline capable of elevating the human being above the gross world, of making one participate in the universal harmony. Such seekers have been numerous from early times in the Islamic world, which, thanks to them, can pride itself on an extremely fecund tradition of musical theory as well as of the practice of vocal and instrumental music. Among the theoreticians who thought and wrote about music, two clearly distinguishable schools can be recognized which sometimes converged, but more often, went along their separate paths, drawing on their own sources and applying different methods of investigation. They are, on the one side, the philosophers—*falasifa* or *hukama'* (the plural of *hakim*, "sage")—and, on the other side, the mystics—*sufiyya* (the plural of *sufi*) and the *'arifun* or *'urafa'* (alternative plurals of *'arif*, "gnostic").

To the philosopher-sages are linked the great thinkers whose names are forever inseparable from the history of Islamic philosophy: Ya'qub al-Kindi (d. 866 CE); Abu Bakr al-Razi (Rhazes, d. 923 CE); Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950 CE); whose *Great Book on Music* (*Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir*) achieved considerable fame; Abu 'Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE); Ibn Bajja (Avempace, d. 1138 CE) and Safi al-Din (d. 1293 CE). Although they inherited the legacy of ancient Greece and resumed the Pythagorean, Aristotelian, Platonic, and Neo-Platonic philosophical discourses, they imprinted on them a unique and profoundly original mark, thus enriching the Greek tradition not only with numerous scientific developments but also with a whole school of thought based on the Qur'anic Revelation.[9] The previously mentioned Ikhwan al-Safa' also belonged to this group. Their "Epistle on Music" opens as follows: "After having completed the study of the theoretical spiritual arts, which are the *genera* of the sciences, and the study of the corporeal practical arts, which are the *genera* of the arts,. . .we propose in the present epistle entitled 'Music' to study the art which is made up of both the corporeal and the spiritual. It is the art of harmony (*ta'lif*), which can be defined as the function of proportions."[10]

Two ideas, therefore, impose themselves at the outset, the first being that music is composed of corporeal and spiritual elements, the second that it is based on proportions. Because of its dual composition, the art of music possesses the special power of freeing matter in order to spiritualize it, and of materializing the spiritual in order to render it perceptible. This power comes also from the fact that music is a science of proportions, as the Ikhwan explain in another epistle (the sixth). After having shown by example how number, proportion, and numerical relationship are applied to all phenomena, they add, "All of these examples demonstrate the nobility of the science of proportion, which is music. This science is necessary for all the arts. Nevertheless, if it was connected with the name of music it is because music offers the best illustration of harmony."[11]

According to the Ikhwan, that which characterizes music and distinguishes it from other arts is that the substance upon which it works (the soul of the listener), like the elements that it employs (notes and rhythms), are of a subtle nature and not corporeal. "Music leaves in the souls of those who listen to it diverse impressions similar to those left by the work of the artisan in the matter that is the substratum of his art." The Ikhwan cite many examples of emotional states that melodies are capable of inspiring in man, such as regret and repentance for past mistakes, courage in battle, relief from suffering, and joyful excitation. Animals themselves are roused by hearing music; the camel quickens his step upon hearing the song of the camel-driver, the horse drinks more willingly when his master whistles a tune, and the gazelle allows herself to be approached at night by the hunter who hums a melody. Ibn Khurdadhbih (d. 912 CE), who was educated in Baghdad by the inspired Ishaq al-Mawsili (d. 850 CE),[12] made the following statement about music in a speech delivered at the court of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tamid, his protector and friend: "Music sharpens the intellect, softens the disposition, and agitates the soul. It gives cheer and courage to the heart, and high-mindedness to the debased.... It is to be preferred to speech, as health would be to sickness."[13]

Not only does music stir the soul and the emotions, but it also "descends" into the body. From there comes its power to move the body and make it dance, and from there also come the therapeutic applications to which the classical treatises refer, notably those of al-Kindi and Ibn Sina. Besides this, music "rises" as far as the Spirit because it is itself a vibration of supernatural origin like the *kun* (the Arabic command, "Be!"), the primordial *fiat lux,* which from nothingness, from silence, and from darkness, existence was brought forth. Thus, the remark of Ibn Zayla (d. 1048 CE), a disciple of Ibn Sina: "Sound produces an influence on the soul in two directions. One is on account of its special composition, i.e. its physical content, the other is on account of its being similar to the soul, i.e. its spiritual content."[14]

Because of the power of its effects (*ta'thir*), the theosophical Ikhwan and most Sufis gave music the highest rank, for music sets souls in flights that

are determined in measured proportion by the human receptacle in which souls are contained: "Know, my brethren, that the effects imprinted by the rhythms and melodies (*naghamat*) of the musician in the souls of listeners are of different types. In the same way, the pleasure that souls draw from these rhythms and the melodies and the manner in which they enjoy them are variable and diverse. All of this depends on the rank that each soul occupies in the domains of knowledge (*al-ma'arif*) and on the nature of the good actions that make up the permanent object of one's love. Therefore, each soul, while listening to descriptions that correspond to the object of one's desires, and to melodies which are in accord with the object of one's delight, rejoices, is exalted, and delights in the image that music makes of the beloved."[15]

The Ikhwan al-Safa' conclude their epistle on music with a justification of the most beautiful and the most perfect music, which is none other than the psalmody of sacred texts: "Tradition teaches that the sweetest melody that the inhabitants of Paradise have at their disposal and the most beautiful song they hear is the discourse of God, great be His praise." It is thus that the word of God Most High states, "The greeting that will welcome them there will be, 'Salvation!' And the end of their invocation will be, 'Praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds' (Qur'an 10:10–11). It is said that Moses (may peace be upon him) was overcome with joy upon hearing the words of his Lord, and was overcome with happiness and rapture to the point of being unable to contain himself. He was overwhelmed by emotion and transported while listening to this serene melody. From that point on, he regarded all rhythms, all melodies, and all songs as insignificant."

SUFIS AND THE SPIRITUAL AUDITION (*AL-SAMA'*)

To listen to music is, in the final analysis, to open oneself to an influence, to a vibration of supra-human origin that is "made sound" in order to awaken in us the echoes of a primordial state and to arouse in the heart a longing for union with its Essence. At the beginning of a long chapter in *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (The Revival of the Sciences of Religion) that he consecrates to the laws governing the spiritual concert of song and ecstasy (*al-sama'*), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) writes:

> Hearts and inmost selves are treasuries of secrets and mines of jewels. Infolded in them are their jewels like as fire is infolded in iron and stone, and concealed like as water is concealed under dust and loam. There is no way to the extracting of their hidden things save by the flint and steel of listening to music and singing, and there is no entrance to the heart save by the antechamber of the ears. So musical tones, measured and pleasing, bring forth what is in it and make evident its beauties and defects. For when the heart is moved, there is made evident only that which it contains like a vessel drips only what is in it. And

> listening to music and singing is for the heart a true touchstone and a speaking standard; whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which preponderates in it.[16]

For the person in whom the desire for the good and the beautiful predominates, and who has an ear for music, music is a privileged tool for self-knowledge and inward improvement. Manifesting the latent possibilities of the individual, it permits one to observe, by its movements and reciprocal tonal interactions, potentialities of which one has not been aware until that moment. A sense of discrimination operates in the listener, which makes one perceive in the inmost heart, with an acuity in proportion to the quality of the music and to one's own receptive capacity, zones of aspiration toward the Absolute, often in alternation with emotional attractions. This age-old doctrine, taught by the sages of Antiquity and elevated by generations of Sufis to the rank of a veritable alchemy of the soul, has been transmitted and maintained down to the present time. It is summarized by a sentence that the father of a contemporary Turkish musician who specializes in the songs of the Sufi brotherhoods inscribed on his tambourine: "This instrument increases both the love of the lover and the hypocrisy of the hypocrite."

The use of the spiritual concert (*sama'*) as a technique for spiritual realization must necessarily surround itself with conditions and precautions that will guarantee its efficacy and that will overcome the wandering and misguidance of the passional soul (*nafs*). These conditions are generally the same as those demanded of candidates for the initiatic path (*al-tariqa*): moral and spiritual qualifications for the disciple, obedience to the spiritual master (*shaykh* or *pir*), service to one's fellow adepts (*fuqara'*), and the strict observance of ritual practices particular to the order, as well as those of the Shari'a. Most important, at the time of participation in sessions of spiritual concert, dervishes are enjoined to remain as sober as possible and to exteriorize their emotions only when they undergo an ecstatic rapture so great that it exceeds all control. Referring to the example of the Prophet Muhammad who, at the time of the first appearance of the Archangel of Revelation, could not master his emotions, Hujwiri excuses those beginners who show excitement in *sama'*: "You must not exceed the proper bounds until audition manifests its power. [However,] when it has become powerful you must not repel it but must follow it as it requires: if it agitates, you must be agitated, and if it calms, you must be calm.... The auditor must have enough perception to be capable of receiving the Divine influence and of doing justice to it. When its might is manifested on his heart he must not endeavor to repel it, and when its force is broken he must not endeavour to attract it."[17]

Al-Ghazali expresses a similar opinion in the *Ihya'*: "The participant should remain seated, his head lowered as if he were deep in meditation, and avoid

clapping his hands, dancing, or making any other movement designed to artificially induce ecstasy or to make a display of it.... But when ecstasy takes hold of him and causes him to make movements independent of his will, he is to be excused and must not be blamed."

However, the same master admits that it is certainly not blameworthy to imitate the attitudes and movements of an ecstatic if the intention is not to make a display of a state that one has not attained, but rather to put oneself into a frame of mind receptive to grace: "Know that ecstasy (*wajd*) *is* divided into that which attacks and that which is forced, and that which is called 'the affectation of ecstasy' (*tawajud*). Of this forced affectation of ecstasy there is that which is blameworthy, which is what aims at hypocrisy and at the manifestation of the Glorious States despite being destitute of them. And of it there is that which is praiseworthy, which leads to the invoking of the Glorious States and the gaining of them for oneself and bringing them to oneself by device. Therefore, the Apostle of God commanded him who did not weep at the reading of the Qur'an that he should force weeping and mourning; for the beginning of these States is sometimes forced while their ends thereafter are true."[18]

Summarizing the teachings of numerous masters of Sufism in his glossary of Sufi technical terms, the Moroccan Sufi Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba (d. 1809 CE) describes four successive degrees of approach toward ecstasy:

> First, the "seeking out of ecstasy" (*tawajud*), in which one affects the appearances of ecstatic emotion (*wajd*) and one uses them methodically; thus, one employs dance (*raqs*), rhythmic movements, etc. This seeking out is only admissible among the *fuqara'* [Sufi adepts] who have made vows of total renunciation. For them, there is nothing wrong in simulating ecstasy and in repeating its gestures in order to respond to an inner call (*hal*).... It is, certainly, the station of the weak, but the strong practice it nevertheless, either in order to sustain and encourage the weaker ones, or because they find a sweetness in it.... Myself, when I participated in a session of spiritual concert with our Shaykh al-Buzidi, I saw him sway from right to left. One of the disciples of Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi told me that his master would not stop dancing until the end of the concert.[19]
>
> In the second place comes "ecstatic emotion" (*wajd*), through which must be heard "that which befalls the heart" and takes hold of it unexpectedly, without the person having any part in it. It can be an ardent and anxious desire or a troubling fear....
>
> Thirdly, one speaks of "ecstatic meting" (*wijdan*), when the sweetness of the presence is prolonged, accompanied most frequently by intoxication and stupor.
>
> Finally, if the meeting lasts until the stupor and hindrances dissipate and the faculties of meditation and insight are purified, it becomes ecstasy (*wujud*), the station to which Junayd (d. 911 CE)[20] alluded in this verse: "My ecstasy is that I disappear from existence, by the grace of what appears to me of the Presence."[21]

ELEMENTS OF MUSICAL EXPRESSION

The animating power of music comes, as we have seen, from what music is in essence—a manifestation of the Divine Word, a language that reminds the human being of the state in which, before creation, one was still united with the Universal Soul, radiated from the original Light, which reminds the person of the instant in preeternity when, according to a Qur'anic verse frequently cited by the Sufis, the Lord asked souls before their manifestation: "Am I not your Lord?" and they answered, "Indeed, we do so testify" (Qur'an 7:172). It is the memory of this primordial covenant and the nostalgia for it that music evokes in hearts trapped within their earthly attachments.

There is in music an interpenetration of two aspects inherent in Allah, the Supreme Being. One is the aspect of Majesty (*jalal*), which translates into rhythm, and the other is the aspect of Beauty (*jamal*), which melody renders. The drum, which is beaten rhythmically, announces the arrival and the presence of the all-powerful King. It is a symbol of transcendence, of the discontinuity that separates us, impoverished and dependent, from God, the Highest, who subsists in Himself. Conversely, the human voice and the flute, which express melody, sing of the Immanence, of the inexhaustible Wealth (*ghina'*) that no human imagination will ever comprehend, but whose every manifestation, mode, or station (*maqam*) is capable of becoming a grace and a blessing for the believer.

Musical Instruments

Each of the elements of the spiritual concert is invested with a symbolic value and becomes an aid for recollection or remembrance (*dhikr*) for those who are attentive to the language of signs. According to Ahmad Ghazali (d. 1126 CE), who taught the elements of a whirling Sufi dance approximately a century and a half before Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi made the whirling dance of the Sufis famous:

> The saints of Allah apply the forms to the realities (*ma'ani*) on account of their abandoning the ranks of the forms and their moving in the ranks of the branches of gnosis. So among them the tambourine is a reference to the cycle of existing things (*da'irat al-akwan*); the skin which is fitted on to it is a reference to Absolute Being, the striking which takes place on the tambourine is a reference to the descent of the divine visitations from the innermost arcana within the Absolute Being to bring forth the things pertaining to the essence from the interior to the exterior.... And the breath of the musician is the form of the rank of the Truth (Exalted and holy is He!), since it is He who sets them in motion, brings them into existence, and enriches them. And the voice of the singer is a reference to the divine life, which comes down from the innermost arcana to

> the levels of the spirits, the hearts, and the consciences (*asrar*). The [reed] flute (*qasab*) is a reference to the human essence, and the nine holes [in the flute] are a reference to the openings in the outer frame (*zahir*), which are nine, viz. the ears, the nostrils, the eyes, the mouth, and the private parts. And the breath which penetrates the flute is a reference to the light of Allah penetrating the reed of man's essence. And the dancing is a reference to the circling of the spirit round the cycle of existing things in order to receive the effects of the unveilings and revelations; and this is the state of the gnostic. The whirling is a reference to the spirit's standing with Allah in its inner nature (*sirr*) and being (*wujud*), the circling of its look and thought, and its penetrating the ranks of existing things; and this is the state of the assured one. And his leaping up is a reference to his being drawn from the human station to the station of unity and to existing things acquiring from him spiritual effects and illuminative aids.[22]

It will be noted that in this passage Ahmad Ghazali makes no mention of stringed instruments. That is because he, like his more famous brother Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, considered stringed instruments forbidden "by general consensus" (*ijmaʿ*). This was because, during the first centuries of Islam, frequent use of stringed instruments was made by effeminates (*mukhannathun*) for evenings of entertainment that were hardly compatible with the concerns of the men of God. Their disapproval of stringed instruments, however, was not universal and only reflected the uncertainties that, even in mystical circles, existed on the subject of musical practice. It did not prevent the lute, the *tanbur* (pandore), the *rabab* (rebec), and the *qanun* (zither) from finding their place next to the drums and the reed flute (*nay*) in the oratorios of several Sufi orders, such as the Mevlevis ("Whirling Dervishes") and the Bektashis of Turkey, the Chistis of India, and much later (mid-ninteenth century), the Shadhilis-Harraqis of Morocco, who adopted for their sessions of remembrance the instruments of the classical Andalusian musical session, the *nawba*.

Musical instruments were held in the highest esteem by the philosopher-musicologists of Islam, who based scholarly studies concerning the groupings and divisions of notes on them. It must be remembered that the philosopher Farabi, among others, was himself such a marvelous lute player that he was able, according to his contemporaries, to hold his listeners in rapt attention, to put them to sleep, to make them laugh or cry, and to inspire in them feelings that matched his own spiritual "moments." Although such accounts may seem exaggerated today, they are consistent with the theory of the tuning of the lute, formulated by the Arab philosopher al-Kindi among others, according to which the four strings of the instrument corresponded to fundamental micro- and macrocosmic quaternaries, such as the Animal Tendencies (gentleness, cowardice, intelligence, and courage), the Faculties of the Soul (mnemonic, attentive, imaginative, and cognitive), and the Elements (water, earth, air, and fire).[23]

Melodic Modes

The effect that Islamic music, whether vocal or instrumental, has on the soul is directly connected with its modal structure, which, technically speaking, is without doubt its fundamental characteristic. In contrast to Western music, which has only two modes, the major and the minor, Oriental modes are quite numerous. Contemporary Arab, Turkish, and Persian musicians list them most often as numbering either 32 or 24. Of these modes, 12 are very commonly used, but in the classical epoch, more than a hundred modes were used.[24]

A "mode" (Arabic *maqam,* Turkish *makam,* Persian *dastgah* or *avaz*) is a type of melody that is expressed by a series of well-defined sounds.[25] It is a series (*sullam,* literally, "ladder") of sounds, corresponding approximately to a Western scale, that does not have to use the same notes for ascending and descending to the octave. Each mode carries a specific name that may denote, for example, its geographic origin (*Hijaz, Nahawand,* or *'Iraqi*), the position of its dominant note on the lute—*Dugah* (second position, or A), *Sikah* (third position, or B)—or suggests the state of the soul or the phenomenon that the mode is supposed to translate into music (*Farahfaza,* "joyous," *Nasim,* "breeze;" *Saba,* "morning wind" the bringer of longing; or *Zamzama,* "murmur"). It is said that musicians in former times had a precise knowledge of the virtues of the modes and performed them in accordance with this knowledge. This still occurs in Pakistan and northern India, where the system of *ragas* obeys rules very similar to those of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic modes. Thus, medieval Muslim musicians played certain melodies only during certain seasons, at certain hours of the day, or on special occasions in conjunction with the places and the ceremonies for which they wished to create a propitious ambience, a spiritual or emotional aura. In the opinion of specialists of Turkish music: "The emancipation of music, its detachment from the complex base of human activities, has certainly taken from the *makam* much of its original character, but a portion remains alive, even if it is unconscious. Musicians recognize a *makam* right from the first notes.... Therefore, the *makam* always exerts an influence, but only long practice permits one to feel it."[26]

From the mystical perspective, the exploration of a mode by a performer who on the one hand, humbly adapts himself to the preexisting pattern that makes up the mode and, on the other hand, improvises a series of melodic passages and vocalizations around the essential notes, constitutes a true spiritual discipline. It demands as its basic condition a sort of poverty (*faqr*) through a sense of detachment or interior emptiness, and in compensation brings about the unveiling of a state (*hal*) or contemplative station, which, in Sufi terminology, is also called a *maqam*. This terminological correspondence is not accidental. Lifted up on the wings of the melody, the musician progresses from *maqam* to *maqam,* up to the extreme limits of

joy and plenitude, carrying along in his wake those listeners whose hearts have been opened.

Rhythm

The rhythmic structures of Arabo-Islamic music (*usul,* from *asl,* "root," or *iqa'at,* singular *iqa,* "beat") serve the function of sustaining the melody while providing it with conceptual divisions, a temporal framework, and sometimes also a profound and majestic sonorous base. They produce periods of equal duration, which, like the meters of prosody, are composed of beats that are at times regular or uneven, broken, and precipitous. The beats themselves are of two kinds: muffled and clear. Their varied combinations evoke the alternation of complementary principles—such as heat and cold, dry and humid, active and passive—in the sustenance and renewal of cosmic harmony. The effect of rhythm on the human soul is described in the following way by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a contemporary scholar of the science and sacred art of Islam: "The rhythm, the meter of the music changes the relation of man with ordinary time which is the most important characteristic of the life of this world. Persian music possesses extremely fast and regular rhythms in which there are no beats or any form of temporal determination. In the first instance man is united with the pulsation of cosmic life, which in the human individual is always present in the form of the beating of the heart. Man's life and the life of the cosmos become one, the microcosm is united to the macrocosm.... In the second case, which transcends all rhythm and temporal distinction, man is suddenly cut off from the world of time; he feels himself situated face to face with eternity and for a moment benefits from the joy of extinction (*fana'*) and permanence (*baqa'*)."[27]

The Human Voice

Among the Arabs as among the ancient Semites, music was primarily a vocal art, designated by the word *ghina',* "song," which for a long time served to signify music, before it was supplanted by the term *musiqa,* derived from the Greek. In pre-Islamic Arabia, music was sung in verses, which the soothsayers and magicians used to render their oracles and utter their incantations. And even if bards and professional singers (*qa'inat*) played instruments, these served above all to introduce or to accompany the sung poems.

The advent of Islam did not change the attraction exercised by vocal music, and song and poetry remained respected arts during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad as well as after it. It is told, for example, how Muhammad admitted the presence of singers among his wives or how, while traveling, he asked some of his companions to sing the *huda',* poems that

punctuated the march of the caravans.[28] When the chronicler Isfahani reports, in the 20 volumes of his *Book of Songs* (*Kitab al-aghani*) composed in the tenth century CE, the acts and gestures of the successive generations of musicians up to the Abbassid Caliphate, it is the cultural life of Arabia and the Near East, both before and after Islamization, that he brings before our eyes.

For the philosopher and musicologist Farabi, only the human voice was capable of attaining to perfect music, that is, to that which unites the three virtues of the art of music: the ability to bring pleasure and calm, the ability to provoke certain emotions and sentiments, and the ability to speak to the imagination and inspire ideas. "Instrumental music sometimes possesses certain of these qualities," concludes Farabi, implying by this statement that instrumental music never possesses them all.[29] He thus expresses a consensus of opinion that has always prevailed in the world of Islam, that what makes the human voice the most appropriate instrument for perfect music is above all its aptitude to convey the Divine Word. When, in a rare exception, an instrument such as the *nay,* the reed flute of the Mevlevi dervishes, also attains to the perfect music, this is because the *nay* is itself a voice, the breath of the human soul that traverses the body, a microcosm purified by love.

MUSICAL GENRES

In each of the great ethno-linguistic sectors of the Muslim world—the Arab, the Persian, the Turkish, and the South Asian (without mentioning here the Malays and Chinese who, because of their distance, have been less permeated by the classical artistic models of Islam except as it concerns the liturgical arts, the recitation of the Qur'an, and calligraphy)—three musical genres coexist:

a. *Liturgical and devotional music:* In addition to Qur'anic psalmody, whose exceptional importance has already been underlined, Islamic liturgical music includes the call to prayer, songs dedicated to the praise of the Prophet, and those that, among the Shiites, commemorate the martyred Imams, and the multiple forms of the spiritual concert (*sama'*), with or without dance, practiced by the Sufis.

b. *Classical music of an intellectual nature:* This is primarily the music of the cities, of princely courts, and of men of letters and dignitaries. Although this music is intended to give birth to diverse nuances of aesthetic emotion (*tarab*), because it rests on the same technical base as liturgical music, it can show itself capable, if played with the desired intention and in the proper context, of opening the doors of mystical experience to the listeners.

c. *Popular music:* If in general this music only aims at marking the seasonal rhythms and at celebrating occasions for rejoicing or mourning, it nonetheless

> allows itself in many instances to be penetrated by Islam and thus opens to the common person exceptional possibilities for going beyond oneself.

Strictly speaking, only the first of these categories, liturgical music, relates directly to the sacred domain; thus, it is this music in particular that will be discussed in the following sections. Among the classical and popular musical styles of the Islamic world, only those that, adopted by the mystics, found their way into the *zawiyas, tekkes,* and *sama'-khanehs* will be examined. By so doing, we will perhaps succeed in evoking the immense richness of the sonorous heritage of Islam and inspire the reader to seek out musical experiences that no description is capable of replacing.

The Call to Prayer (adhan)

Instituted by the Prophet Muhammad soon after the hijra from Mecca to Medina, the call to prayer has been, among the exterior signs of Islam, the most powerful symbol of the influence of the realm of the Divine upon the world of the human being. Chanted five times each day, every day of the year, the *adhan* marks time and fills it. Issued from the tops of minarets toward the four cardinal points, it traverses and fills space, thus affirming the sacred character of these two dimensions in which human existence unfolds. By the proclamation of the *takbir,* the formula *Allahu akbar,* "God is infinitely great," and of the *Shahada,* the Islamic testimony of faith, it places the entire universe under the sign of transcendence. The words of the call to prayer also liken prayer to joy (*falah*), enjoining the faithful to interrupt their ordinary chores or pleasures for a moment of consecration, a veritable preparation and prelude to the beatitude that awaits the believers in the Hereafter.

Like psalmody, the *adhan* uses modes of cancellation that can vary according to region; however, in all of these variations, under a diversity of styles, the same homogeneous structure appears. The one who is charged with giving the call to prayer, the muezzin (*mu'adhdhin*), is chosen not only for his beautiful voice (the muezzin is invariably a man) but also for his human qualities and piety. Sometimes the muezzin also performs the functions of the Imam of a mosque, and many of them participate as singers (*munshid*) at religious festivals and spiritual gatherings.

Music in Praise of the Prophet (amdah nabawiyya)

The second great source of knowledge in Islam after the Qur'an is the Prophet Muhammad, whose teachings, transmitted in the collections of Hadith, and whose deeds, related in biographical accounts of his life (*Sira*), make up the prophetic example, the Sunna. If Qur'anic psalmody was able

to give birth to different forms of modulated recitation, the love of the Prophet, for its part, has given rise to a great wealth of literary compositions and devotional songs.

The importance of these litanies is linked in Islamic mysticism to the doctrine of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*). Although Muhammad was a man who lived and died like other men, he was certainly not an ordinary man. He was, according to the Sufi saying, "like a ruby among stones." He is also called "The Best of God's Creation" (*khayr khalq Allah*) and in the Qur'an, "a fine example" (*uswa hasana,* Qur'an 33:61) for the believers, meaning by this that he is the summation of the entire creation, a universal model. To offer prayers on behalf of the Prophet is thus to pray for the salvation of all believers. It is also to pray for the rediscovery of one's own primordial nature and for one's own deliverance. Mystical gatherings in the Islamic world almost always begin with praise of the Prophet. In the Syrian *zawiyas* of the Qadiri or Shadhili Sufi orders, for example, the gatherings open with a song, performed as a solo, of the *Mawludiyya* ("Birthday Song") of Shaykh Barzanji (d. 1765 CE). The words of this song are as follows: "Our Lord Muhammad was always smiling and affable. He never showed the least brutality or the least violence in his words or in his criticisms. He never made a show of his desires and he abstained from judging others and speaking ill of them. When he spoke, his companions kept silent, as if a bird had perched on their heads. Never did they raise their voices in argument, and when they spoke, it was he who was silent."

Another poem that is also very popular among the Sufis of North Africa and the Middle East is the *Burda,* the "Cloak," composed by Muhammad al-Busiri (d. 1296 CE), who is buried in the Egyptian city of Alexandria. The title of this poem recalls a miraculous healing. Having been stricken with paralysis, Shaykh Busiri in a dream saw the Prophet, who enveloped him in his cloak. Upon awakening, he found himself cured and able to move. He also found that the poem of the *Burda* was carried within him and that it only needed to be transcribed. For more than seven centuries, this poem has been recited in choruses by generations of Sufis. As a poem of 162 verses, and rhyming in the Arabic letter *mim* (*qasida mimiyya*), it lends itself admirably to quick rhythmic variations and possesses a great emotional charge when it is sung in unison.

In Turkey, the meetings of the Mevlevis, the "Whirling Dervishes," also open with a song in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. This is the *Naat i-Sherif* ("The Noble Praise-Song"), whose words were composed by the great Sufi master Rumi (d. 1273 CE), and whose music is attributed to the Mevlevi Sufi composer Itri (d. 1711 CE). The solemnity of this song, which is reminiscent of Byzantine psalmody, plunges those who hear it into a state of remembrance and recollection (*dhikr*), which prepares them to perform the whirling dance. Its words go like this:

Oh Beloved of God, oh incomparable Messenger,
Preferred among all Creatures, the Light of Our Eyes,
You know the weakness of nations,
You are the guide for the infirm,
The Guardian of the Garden of Prophecy,
The springtime of Gnosis.
You are the rose garden of the Law and its most beautiful flower.

Examples such as these could be multiplied. They illustrate the ways in which Muslims—while keeping themselves away from the deification of the Prophet—revered the Prophet Muhammad as an ever-present spiritual guide, who is able to help the seeker through his influence and intercession to approach the Lord of the Worlds. In Sufism, this role was not only reserved for the Prophet but also included several categories of saints, both living and dead, who were seen as living embodiments of the Prophetic example. In Shiite Islam, devotion to the Prophet was complemented by devotion to the Imams and their representatives.

Devotional Music of Shiite Islam

Among the genres of music that are practiced in contemporary Iran, certain ones show a devotional efficacy and an incontestable mystical resonance. These are first of all the ceremonial musical styles associated with the great Shiite mourning period of *Azadari,* which commemorates the Karbala' massacre in which Imam Husayn and many members of his family were martyred in 680 CE. These events are recalled in the singing of poems, especially those composed at the beginning of the seventeenth century by Husayn Wa'iz Kashifi in his *Garden of the Martyrs.* This collection of poems has become so popular that the first word of its title, *rozeh* (from the Arabic *rawda,* "garden"), now designates all gatherings, whether they are held in a mosque or in a private home, during which the martyrdom of the Shiite Imams is evoked. The *rozeh khans,* the singers who specialize in the recitation of these poems, are held in high esteem by the people of Iran.

The mourning period of *Azadari* takes place between the first and the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic year. Its highlight is a procession of penitents and flagellants, who ritually express remorse for the failure of Imam Husayn's followers to come to his aid. The procession is accompanied by songs and exclamations that are modulated to the rhythm of the march, and that are used by the penitents to punctuate the blows of their fists to their chests and backs.

Theatrical presentations also retrace the same tragic events. These are the *ta'ziyas,* sacred dramas that have been enacted, at least since the eighteenth century, in the open air in a location that has been specially arranged (*takyeh*). The *takyeh* includes an elevated stage surrounded by an open space for the

actors and their mounts. The performance lasts well into the night and includes processions accompanied by songs and the sounds of trumpets, with rhythms maintained by drums and cymbals. The actors' cries of "Hassan, Husayn," the names of the martyred grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, return again and again, arousing echoes and tears in the crowd. Each sequence of the *ta'ziya* drama is sung in a mode (*dastgah*), that corresponds to the nature of the scene and the character of the person represented.[30] One finds in this singing an example of classical Islamic music that was popularized and later became a source of inspiration for numerous court musicians, particularly during the Qajar period of Iranian history (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE).

Also specific to Iran is the music of the *zurkhaneh,* centers of martial training where the participants wield clubs and heavy chains, spurred on by lyrical songs and powerful rhythms. The *zurkhaneh* is a school in which corporal discipline serves the ideal of chivalry. In Persian culture, chivalry was first incarnated in the figure of Rustam, the mythical hero of the "Book of Kings" (*Shah-Nameh*). This Persian cultural tradition was assimilated to Islam by including with Rustam 'Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the first of the Shiite Imams, whose courage earned him the nickname "Lion of God."

The Qawwalis of South Asia

The mystical songs known as *Qawwali* (from the Arabic root *qul,* "to say") were popularized in India by the Chishtiyya Sufi order during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE. This is attributed sometimes to the patronage of Shaykh Mu'in al-Din Chishti (d. 1236 CE), the founder of the order, and sometimes to that of the Sufi poet Amir Khusraw (d. 1326 CE), whose tomb in Delhi adjoins that of Nizam al-Din Awliya' (d. 1325 CE), the fourth great master of the Chishti order. The tomb of Nizam al-Din remains to this day one of the preferred meeting places of the *qawwal,* that is, the singers of *Qawwali* music. In this sanctuary throughout the year one can hear dervishes singing their religious hymns and poems while accompanying themselves on drums. On holidays, concerts are organized in which eight to ten singers accompanied by various instruments participate. These instruments include the Japanese zither, the clarinet, a drum shaped like a cask (*dholak*), the violin (*sarangi*), and a small manual harmonium, which was imported from Europe in the nineteenth century.

The lyrics of *Qawwali* songs, sometimes in Urdu and sometimes in Persian, are borrowed from the repertoire of the figurative type of Sufi poetry. This poetry is noted for evocations of terrestrial beauty, such as the garden, with its flowers and perfumes, wine, taverns and cupbearers, and the face of the beloved and the sighs of the lover. These evocations are

believed to elevate the soul toward contemplation of celestial realities and to lead it back to its true existence. Repetitive formulas drawn from the Qur'an such, as *Huwa Allah,* "He is God," often separate the stanzas of the songs and are taken up as a refrain by the audience. As in the Shadhili or Mevlevi *sama'* sessions, certain songs are praises of the Prophet Muhammad or his Companions and the saints who came after them. Others are connected with the Arabic poetic tradition, especially the Persian love song (*ghazal*). Here in the ambience of the Sufi brotherhoods is a musical art, which, while expressing itself at a popular level, remains spiritually rich through its permeation by the rhythms and melodic modes (*ragas*) of Hindustani music.

The Music of the Kurdish "People of the Truth" (Ahl-i Haqq)

In Iranian Kurdistan (especially in the province of Kirmanshah), and in other regions where Kurdish communities are numerous such as Iraq, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, there exists a Shiite sect of an esoteric nature, the *Ahl-i Haqq* or "People of the Truth," for whom music plays an important role during their ritual assemblies.[31] The importance given to music by this sect rests in doctrinal and theosophical considerations that are heavily influenced by Ismailism and are close to Sufism. Central to these considerations is the notion that music awakens the aspiration of the believer and links him once again to the God the Beloved (*Yar*), with whom a covenant was sealed in Pre-Eternity.

Technically speaking, the principal characteristic of Ahl-i Haqq music is the almost exclusive use that it makes of the *tanbur,* a type of long-necked mandolin having two, sometimes three, metallic strings and sixteen frets, which, when touched with the fingertips, produce one low sound and one high-pitched sound. The high-pitched sound is used especially for performing solos, while the low sound is used for accompanying singers. Each spiritual guide (*pir*) of the Ahl-i Haqq is a musician who, while playing the melodies transmitted by the tradition (certain among them dating from the eleventh century CE), renews the primordial covenant in the manner in which the Angel Gabriel, *Pir-Binyanun,* celebrated it with the angels and later on the occasion of his earthly appearances.

The spiritual and musical assembly (*jam'*) of the Ahl-i Haqq includes a series of chanted recitations, during which the chanter (*kalam-khwan*), who accompanies himself on the *tanbur,* sings religious poems. Those who are in attendance take up the refrain in a chorus and at times clap their hands to mark the rhythm. They often return to the invocation, "My beginning and my end are the Beloved (*Yar*)," in order, they say, to attract the heart's attention to the divine Principle. One of the remarkable traits of this music is that it has kept many of the characteristics of the ancient Iranian tradition of court music, which, following several periods of persecution, especially in

the late Safavid period (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries CE), were completely lost. This is why both Iranian musicians and Western musicologists are academically interested in the 12 melodic modes (*dastgah*) that are expressed in the sacred songs and hymns that resonate throughout the rural sanctuaries of the Ahl-i-Haqq: "The Eternal Hunter, oh my soul, has cast the net of the Pact, oh my soul."

The Spiritual Audition of Classical Music

Throughout the Muslim world very close threads have been woven between the mystical path and the principal expressions of classical music, this music having shown itself capable, as the Ikhwan al-Safa' affirmed, not only of arousing aesthetic emotion (*tarab*) but also of putting the soul in communication with spiritual realities. The distinction between sacred music, devoted to worship, and profane music was often abolished, and music "for entertainment," with its inseparable constituent of sung poetry, was retained in literary and artistic circles as well as in mystical gatherings. Because of the diverse levels of interpretation to which the majority of Muslim poetic compositions lent themselves, with their metaphorical and allegorical language, Sufi musicians did not hesitate, following the example of the *Qawwal* of India in the singing of *ghazals,* to introduce into their concerts "profane" poems that were charged with a supra-terrestrial resonance.

Conversely, musicians without a mystical affiliation appreciated the works of Sufi poets, if not for the profundity of their symbolism, then at least for their evocative power and formal beauty. Sufi poetical works used in musical concerts include the *Great Ta'iyya* (a poem with each verse ending in the Arabic letter *ta'*) and the *Khamriyya* (wine poem) of the Egyptian Sufi 'Umar ibn al-Farid (d. 1234 CE) in Arabic, selections from the poems of Hafiz (d. 1389 CE), Jami (d. 1492 CE), or Rumi in Persian and the poems of Yunus Emre (d. ca. 1321 CE) and Ismail Hakki (d. 1724 CE) in Turkish. Thus, music allowed a breath of spirituality to penetrate as far as the interiors of the princely courts and noble residences of the cities. The association between Sufi groups and classical musicians was a quasi-permanent characteristic of medieval Muslim society and it continues to the present day. The importance of this can be illustrated by some examples taken from the great cultural regions of the Islamic world.

Arabo-Andalusian Music

In the Arabic-speaking world, a constant quest for the perfection of musical knowledge was carried on during the first three or four centuries of Islamic history. From the mid-eighth century CE, at the end of the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus, there existed a formal Arabic music, which, being an

elaborated version of the former popular recital, was enriched by Persian and Hellenistic elements borrowed from the new urban environments of the Islamic empire. To ancient poetic meters there came to be added new rhythmic formulas, including the one furnished by the quatrain. Through the influence of such devices, Arabic music assimilated the modal systems of the Byzantines and Persians. To the traditional reed flute and the single-stringed *rabab,* were added the *'ud* (lute), the *qanun* (zither) and the three-stringed violin (*kamanja*), as well as several percussion instruments such as the frame drum (*daff*). This music reached its full development during the long reign of the Abbassids, from 750 to 1258 CE.

Then came the Mongol invasion, the destruction of Baghdad, and the end of the great epoch of Arabo-Islamic civilization. Some musicians survived this disaster and continued to transmit their art in various Oriental cities. However, it would not be possible today to form any kind of precise notion as to what this music was in its plenitude if a branch of this art had not been transplanted from Baghdad to the land of al-Andalus or Islamic Spain, and if it had not later been taken up in North Africa, where it has been perpetuated to the present day. A major figure in this process of transplantation was Ziryab, a musician of genius, who, after having studied with Ishaq al-Mawsili in Baghdad, found himself forced to immigrate to Cordoba in order to escape the jealousy of his teacher. Received there with full honors at the court of the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Rahman II in 821 CE, Ziryab developed an original musical style, which was based on the canons of classical music as performed in Iraq. Relying on the correspondences established by the philosopher Kindi between the four strings of the lute, the four cosmic qualities (cold-humid and hot-dry), the four basic colors (yellow, red, white, and black), and the four human temperaments (bilious, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholic), Ziryab went far in increasing the knowledge and utilization of the psycho-physiological effects of musical modes. He also added a fifth string to the lute, which represented the soul, and elaborated a musical style called the *nawba,* which was thoroughly imbued with these symbolic understandings.[32]

A *nawba,* a word that could be translated approximately as "suite," contains four (five, in Morocco) melodic and rhythmic movements (*dawr*) performed with song and orchestra in an order fixed by Ziryab and that never varied. The order of the movements of the *nawba* is as follows: (1) a free recitative movement (*nashid*), (2) moderato movement (*basit*), (3) rapid passages (*muharrakat*), and (4) a lively finale (*hazajat*). There are currently 11 *nawbas,* each of which is performed in a particular musical mode (*maqam*),[33] which expresses a specific feeling or sentiment: the major mode (*rasd*) expresses pride; the mode of lovers (*'ushshaq*) expresses joy and is played in the morning; the mode of *maya* evokes the sadness of separation and is played in the evening; the mode of *ramelmaya* is reserved for praise of the Prophet Muhammad.

A concert of Andalusian music always has a soothing and purifying effect on the souls of listeners, whether it be in a light style (*kalam al-hazl*) or a serious style (*kalam al-jadd*), or whether its recitatives are borrowed from classical prosody (*kalam mawzun*) or popular poetry (*kalam malhun*), or whether, as often happens, it alternates different styles. All vulgarity is excluded from this music and the numerous allusions and conventional but always efficacious images with which it is punctuated are a constant call to return toward the Source of Beauty. Themes that are evoked in Andalusian music include the divine or earthly beloved; the personified Night (*Layla*), whose presence is awaited with hope and longing; the earthly and paradisal Garden with its flowers, its fruits, and its streams of nectar; the Friend of God (the Prophet Muhammad) and God Himself, named by his ‘‘Beautiful Names’’ (Qur’an 77:180). The continued popularity of these themes is why in the Moroccan city of Fez, for example, the authorities and dignitaries of the city have patronized Andalusian music for over 700 years and still encourage the practice of an art felt to be supremely compatible with their religious sentiments.

This is also why, despite the rule usually followed in the cities of North Africa, where the performance of instrumental music was excluded from the religious context, some forms of *sama‘* derived directly from Andalusian music and using its instruments (the lute, the *rabab,* the tambourine, and the flute) found blessings in the eyes of certain Sufi masters. In the northern Moroccan city of Tetouan, which has been a refuge for Andalusian artistic traditions from the time of the exodus of the Muslims from Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, an eminently ‘‘orthodox’’ Sufi order can be found—the Harraqiyya founded around 1845 by Muhammad al-Harraq, a disciple of Mawlay al-‘Arabi al-Darqawi—which uses the instruments and the melodies of the *nawba.* The spiritual sessions of the Harraqiyya are built around the singing of the poems (*diwan*) of Muhammad al-Harraq, whose name alludes to his having been ‘‘burned’’ or consumed with the fires of divine love. Listening to the Andalusian *nawba* prepares the participants for the performance of the sacred dance (*‘imara*) of the Harraqiyya, which is sustained by a chorus of singers (*munshidun*) and by beats of a drum.

Iranian Music

Heir to the rich Sassanian musical tradition, then impregnated by Islamic influences, first Arab and later Turkish and Indian, the music of Iran has managed to preserve its personality and its distinctive characteristics throughout the centuries. The efficacy of music as an agent for the transmutation of the soul has perhaps never been explained as explicitly as by the Sufi Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1209 CE), a master of theology, music, and poetry, who was ‘‘one of the *fideli d’amore* of Islam.’’[34] All of Ruzbihan’s written

works—treatises, commentaries, and poems—are exhortations to return to the Divine Source that calls to the human being, issuing from Itself, by means of the voice of the Qur'anic Word and that of spiritual music, the *sama':* "Sometimes He says, 'You are myself,' and sometimes He says, 'I am you'.... Sometimes, He rejects [the seeker] and sometimes He grants him peace in divine intimacy.... Sometimes He throws him into complete slavery, and sometimes He plunges him into the essence of Lordship. Sometimes He makes him drunken from the Beauty of God, sometimes He belittles him before His Majesty.... All this happens during the *sama'* and still much more."[35]

This is the same message that Rumi delivers in his *Masnavi:* "The believers say that the effects of Paradise will make every voice beautiful. We were all part of Adam and heard those melodies in Paradise. Though water and clay have covered us with doubt, we still remember something of those sounds.... Sounds and songs strengthen the images within the mind, or rather, turn them into forms."[36]

That the Persians were particularly gifted at composing, performing, and listening to music with a spiritual intention is attested to by numerous historical testimonies. In the contemporary period, despite certain signs of degeneration and ruptures that are probably irreparable, there are still musicians to whom it is given to enter into a sublime mystical state (*hal*) and who are able to communicate their state to their listeners. In this state, the artist "plays with an extraordinary facility of performance. His sonority changes. The musical phrase surrenders its secret to him."[37] According to another contemporary observer, even if the hardening of opinion that the official Shiite circles manifested toward the Sufi orders at the end of the Safavid period has more or less discouraged the use of music in mystical gatherings, the content of this music has nonetheless preserved its spiritual efficacy: "There always exists among traditional musicians a certain sense of the sacred."[38] Thus, for the master Davami, the 99-year-old depository of a vast and difficult repertoire, it is indispensable to first have a knowledge of the Hereafter before being able to practice music, this knowledge itself implying a purification of the external senses and the internal faculties which makes a person become like a mirror.

Judging by my personal experience, listening to a concert of Iranian classical music demands of the listener the same meditative disposition and leads him along the same paths and toward the same experiences as an evening of Andalusian music. Even if the resonances of the voices and instruments are different, those of Iran possessing more mildness and femininity, the melodic and rhythmic structures show so many affinities that one feels oneself transported into the same realm. It is a realm of 12 fundamental modes (*avaz*), which subdivide into modal figures (*gusheh*) arranged according to an order (*radif*) established by the greatest masters, and is in part immutable. It is a world where quality does not consist of innovation and of

displays of virtuosity, but rather of exposition with fidelity, while embellishing with appropriate ornamentation and improvisation the various sequences or figures of the chosen mode. The concert thus takes on the aspect of a gathering of friends, where a theme is solemnly introduced and developed and then debated during an exchange of questions and responses before being meditated upon in a collective spirit and finally culminating in the exaltation of a discovery that fills all the listeners with joy.

Turkish Music

The same remarks, or very similar ones, could be applied to the classical music of Turkey. Turkish music was not only an heir to the Arab, Byzantine, and Persian melodic modes but was also the bearer of sounds and rhythms that came from the steppes of Asia and that for centuries was strongly permeated with mystical concerns. In Turkey in fact, perhaps more than in any other Islamic region, the great Sufi religious orders—the Mevlevis, the Bektashis, and the Khalwatis—made use of music in their ceremonies. The Mevlevis in particular trained a large number of singers and instrumentalists, who, while remaining affiliated with the order, became musicians attached to the court of the Ottoman Sultans. Such was the *dede* (dervish) Ismail, one of the great masters of classical music, who was much in favor during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Selim III (r. 1789–1807 CE), and from whom some 150 compositions have been handed down to us.

Performing and listening to *a peshrev* or "prelude," one of the most characteristic forms of Turkish classical music, constitutes an exercise of concentration for the musician and is an invitation to contemplative reflection for the listener. Composed of four parts (*hane*, "house"), each one followed by a refrain (*teslim*), which forms the key to the melodic construction, the *peshrev* is played in one or more modes (*makam*). During its unfolding, which is always slow and restrained, accelerating slightly only at the finale, each musician restricts himself to embellishing the fundamental melody at the appropriate places, adding here and there the conventional grace-notes—the *tashil bezek* or "petrified decoration"—a term that also designates the arabesques of architectural decoration. At the desired moment the musician interrupts the combined movement to perform an improvised solo (*taksim*).

During the sessions of *sama'* of the Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes, the *taksim* solo is always given to the player of the *nay*, the reed flute, which symbolizes the voice of the soul in love with the Absolute: "It is necessary to have heard a *nay* played in a large resonant hall; it is necessary to have seen at the same time the dance of the dervishes, in all its solemnity: to realize the profound inner emotion which is released."[39] However, the use of the *nay* in Turkish music is not restricted to the dervishes. Whether it accompanies vocal ensembles or is integrated into complete instrumental ensembles, which include the

zither (*qanun*), the lute, the *tambur* (a lute with a very long neck allowing the division of the octave by 24 frets), the violin (*kemenceh*) of two or three strings, and percussive instruments, it punctuates most classical concerts with its nostalgic voice.

Hindustani Music

In the realm of the art of music, a remarkable synthesis has taken place between Hindus and Muslims in northern India, beginning with the growth of Islam on the Indian subcontinent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE. The first architects of this synthesis were, as we have seen in relation to the singers of *Qawwalis,* the masters and the members of the Chishtiyya Sufi order who, by the radiance of their faith, brought about conversions to Islam by the hundreds of thousands. Mu'in al-Din Chishti, the founder of this order, believed that "song is the sustenance and the support of the soul,"[40] and under his influence the Chishtiyya Sufis contributed a number of Islamic elements into Indian classical music, while themselves borrowing extensively from the very rich melodic and rhythmic repertoire of India.

In order for such a synthesis to be possible, it was necessary that the theoretical and practical foundations of the two musical universes thus brought into contact—the Arabo-Persian and the Indian—be at least compatible, if not identical. To the theory of "influence" (*ta'thir*), that is to say, the *ethos* of the ancient Greeks that was Arabized and applied to the Arabo-Persian musical modes, corresponds that of the Hindu *bhava,* the nature of the emotion connected to the *raga* (the musical mode of India), which engenders *rasa,* the flavor or state of the soul (Arabic *dhawq* or *hal*) that is particular to each mode. As for the classification of the types of the *raga* and its relationship to the macrocosm and microcosm, this aspect of Indian music theory surpassed in subtlety even that of the Muslim musicologists. All of the conditions were therefore present for the fruitful cross-pollination of musical genres, which often occurred in the princely courts. These courts included that of Sultan 'Ala al-Din Khilji of Delhi, where the Sufi poet, musician, and composer of Turkish origin, Amir Khusraw (d. 1325 CE) inaugurated the style of highly modulated "imaginative" song (*khayal*) and popularized the Persian love poem (*ghazal*). They also included the court of the great Moguls, especially of the emperor Akbar (d. 1605 CE), where Hindu and Muslim musicians brought to perfection such noble styles as the *dhrupad,* which is constructed on rhythmic poems of four verses; the *dhamar,* more rhythmic than the *dhrupad,* and the *tappa,* with its delicate ornamentation.[41]

Even today, the performers of Hindustani music are recruited from among both Hindu and Muslim families, the latter being able to take pride in having contributed through generations of musicians to one of the most beautiful musical traditions humanity has ever known. According to Hindu doctrine,

"He who is expert in the science of modal intervals and scales and who knows the rhythms travels easily on the path of Deliverance."[42] When this perception is combined with the belief, stated by Rumi, that "at the time of *sama'*, the Sufis hear another sound, from God's throne," there can be no doubt that the combination of musical traditions in India was an effective means of reaching inner perfection for members of the two religious communities. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr has stated, comparing the Indian and Muslim musical traditions, "Music is not only the first art brought by [the Hindu god] Siva into the world, and the art through which the *asrar-i alast*, the [Qur'anic] mystery of the primordial Covenant between man and God in that pre-eternal dawn of the day of cosmic manifestation is revealed; but it is also the key to the understanding of the harmony that pervades the cosmos. It is the handmaid of wisdom itself."[43]

Popular Music

In all of the regions penetrated by Islam, numerous forms of popular music were allowed to exist or to expand, in addition to the strictly religious music and the great classical currents that we have just outlined. To make an inventory of all types of popular music would not be possible in these pages, but we would like nevertheless to cite by means of illustration some cases in which popular music is used for the mystical quest. Sometimes, it is music with a classical structure that is popularized by adopting the vernacular language and local instruments. Thus, the *griha* of North Africa, sung in various Arabic dialects—Moroccan, Algerian, or Tunisian—continues the tradition of pre-Islamic odes (*qasida*) that in more classical musical genres were based on the airs of the *nawba*, while the Moroccan, Tunisian, and Libyan *malhun* is a dialectized form of Andalusian music. Both the *griha* and the *malhun* were used to perform innumerable pieces of poetry or rhymed prose composed in dialectical Arabic by Sufi masters.

Throughout the expanse of the Islamic world, non-Arab ethnic groups integrated Islamic formulas into their repertoires. This is the case with the Berbers of the Atlas Mountains, who sing the *ahellel* (Arabic *tahlil*), which is none other than the Islamic profession of faith, *la ilaha illa Allah*. The Moorish women of the Western Sahara dance the *guedra*, an ancient rite of communication with the fecundating forces, while a chorus of men introduces the names of the Prophet Muhammad and the One God into its rhythmic breathing.

A final example taken from the folklore of Morocco illustrates the very frequent situations in which the music of a village, connected to the cult of a local saint, regularly animates religious ceremonies and feasts. The village of Jahjuka, located in the region of Jabala, not far from the northeastern Moroccan town of Ksar el-Kebir, possesses a troupe of clarinetists and

drummers whose origin goes back to the time when 12 centuries ago the village was founded by the Saint Sidi Ahmad Sharqi and his companion, a musician named Muhammad al-'Attar. Each Friday, the musicians march through the village to the tomb of the saint, where the faithful come to ask for healing of diseases of the body and soul. The high-pitched sound of the *ghita* clarinet and the intense rhythm of the drums puts the listener into a state of trance, which opens the way for the blessed influence (*baraka*) of the saint, and facilitates its therapeutic action.

EPILOGUE

From each of these areas of classical music as well as from popular music flow strong and enduring testimonies, showing that various styles of music in the Islamic world, like those that serve more explicitly as vehicles for the words of the Qur'an or the hymns of mystics, are an echo of the Beyond, an open path to the liberation of the soul and its return to the lost Homeland, toward the infinite Silence that is the origin of all sounds. As a providential instrument for the symbolic unification of multiplicity, the traditional music of Islam aids the human being in realizing, through a path of beauty, that "In truth we belong to God, and to Him we will return" (Qur'an 2:156).

NOTES

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1. *Arina al-ashya' kama hiya:* this hadith was cited by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in his "Great Commentary" on the Qur'an (*Mafatih al-Ghayb*), with respect to verse 17:85: "They will question you concerning the Spirit." See al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir,* 2nd ed. (Tehran, n.d.), vols. 21–22, 37.

2. The complete work of the Brethren of Purity includes 51 (or 52) "Epistles" (*rasa'il*), of which the one treating music is the fifth. See "L'épître sur la musique des Ikhwân al-safâ," translation annotated by A. Shiloah, *Revue des Etudes islamiques,* 1964, 125–162; 1966, 159–193. The passages cited hereafter are found on pages 155–158 (1964).

3. A. Shiloah (1966), 185. In the same way, Frithjof Schuon writes, "While listening to beautiful music, the guilty will feel innocent. But the contemplative, on the contrary, while listening to the same music, will forget himself while fathoming the essences." Schuon, *Sur les traces de la religion pérenne* (Paris, 1982), 66–67.

4. H.G. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music to the XIIIth Century* (1929; repr., London, U.K., 1973), 36.

5. ʻAli ibn ʻUthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: the Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufiism,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; repr., London, U.K.: Luzac, 1976), 402.

6. As was the case with the philosopher Farabi (d. 950 CE); see A. Shiloah, *La Perfection des connaissances musicales* (Paris, 1972), 65–68.

7. A translation of this work was made by James Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music* (London, U.K.: Royal Asiatic Society, Oriental Translation Fund, 1938). It is followed by the translation of the treatise entitled *Bawariq al-ilma'* by the Sufi Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 1126 CE), brother of the celebrated Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE). In contrast to Ibn Abi al-Dunya, Ahmad Ghazali supports the legality of music and exalts the virtues of the spiritual concert. In his Introduction to these two treatises (1–13), Robson summarizes the arguments employed by the defenders of these antithetical positions.

8. Cited by M. Molé in "La Danse extatique en Islam," *Les Danses sacrées* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1963), 164. This study contains abundant documentation, drawn from original and often little-known sources, on the arguments for and against the use of music and dance in the mystical path.

9. For a better understanding of the Greco-Islamic affinities and their influence on the theory of music in Islam, one should consult H.G. Farmer, *The Sources of Arabian Music* (Glasgow, 1940), which includes the writings of Arabic authors. See also P. Kraus, *Jabir ibn Hayyan, contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l' Islam,* vol. II, *Jabir et la science grecque* (Cairo, 1942); Y. Marquet, *Imamat, résurrection et hiérarchie selon les Ikhwan as-Safa* in *Revue des Études Islamiques,* 1962, 49–142; E. Werner and J. Sonne, *The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judeo-Arabic Literature,* in *Hebrew Union College Annual,* vols. 16 and 17, wherein three chapters concerning music are translated from the *Kitab adab al falasifa* (Book of the Practice of the Philosophers) by Hunayn ibn Ishaq.

10. Shiloah (1964), 126–127.

11. Ibid.

12. Ishaq al-Mawsili was a singer, composer, theoretician, and historian, as well as a jurist. He played a considerable role in the transmission of a highly refined Arabo-Persian musical tradition under the Abbasid Caliphate. His father Ibrahim (d. 804 CE) was himself a consummate musician. A regular guest of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, he headed the most richly endowed music school of Baghdad. See Farmer, *History,* 124–126.

13. Farmer, *History,* 156.

14. Cited by G.H. Farmer, "The Religious Music of Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1952: 60–65, and also in M.M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy,* vol. 2, 1126. Chapter 58 of this latter work contains a good summary of musical theories, which were expressed in different epochs and in different regions of the Muslim world.

15. Shiloah (1966), 192–193.

16. This passage is from the eighth book of the quarter of the *Ihya'* dealing with social customs (*ʻadat*). It was translated into English by E.B. MacDonald, *Journal of*

the Royal Asiatic Society (1901): 195–252 and 705–746, and (1902), 1–28. This passage appears in (1901), 199.

17. Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub,* 419.

18. Al-Ghazali in MacDonald trans. (1901), 730–731. The hadith to which al-Ghazali alludes states: "If you do not weep, try to weep," and it is often cited to justify certain Sufi practices, such as the sacred dance. See Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 92–93.

19. Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, his master Muhammad al-Buzidi (d. 1814 CE), and the latter's master Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi (d. 1823 CE), belong to the great initiatic line of the Shadhiiliyya, who, in Morocco, gave rise to numerous ramifications such as the Darqawi order, founded by the last cited of these spiritual masters.

20. Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 911 CE) is called the "Master of the Circle" of the Sufis or "Master of the Way" (*Shaykh al-Tariqa*). He lived and died in Baghdad and is considered one of the most important teachers of Sufi doctrines.

21. Jean-Louis Michon, *Le Soufi marocain Ahmad Ibn 'Ajiba et son Mi'raj: Glossaire de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: Vrin, 1973), 241–242.

22. Ahmad Ghazali, *Bawariq al-ilma',* in Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music,* 98–99; and Molé, *Les Danses sacrées,* 205–206

23. On the subject of these quaternary correspondences, which the Arabs systematized from Greek sources, but which also had roots among the ancient Semites, see H.G. Farmer, *Sa'adiyah Gaon on the Influence of Music* (London, U.K., 1943), 9.

24. On the theory of the mode in Arabo-Islamic music, see in particular, R. Erlanger, *La Musique arabe, volume V* (Paris, 1949). On its current practice in diverse areas of the Arabo-Muslim world, see S. Jargy, *Musique arabe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1971), 49–69.

25. The earliest term used in Arabic for the mode was *sawt,* literally, "voice," a term that clearly marks the principally vocal character of Arabo-Islamic music during its first period. Later, authors spoke of *tariqa,* "way" or "manner of acting," a term that has also fallen into disuse.

26. See K. Reinhard and U. Reinhard, *Les Traditions musicales—Turquie* (Paris, 1969), 69–70.

27. Sayyed Hossein Nasr, "The Influence of Sufism on Traditional Persian Music," in *The Sword of Gnosis,* ed. Jacob Needleman (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1974), 330–343.

28. Farmer, *History,* 25.

29. Erlanger, *La musique arabe,* vol. 1, 14–16.

30. Examples of *ta'ziya* music with transcriptions can be found in N. Caron, "La musique chiite en Iran," in *Encyclopédie des musiques sacrées,* vol. I (Paris, 1968), 430–440.

31. The Ahl-i Haqq sect has been thoroughly studied by Mohammad Mokri, who sets the number of its adherents at approximately 500,000. See Mokri, *L'Ésoterisme kurde* (Paris, 1966) and "La musique sacrée des Kurdes" in *Encyclopédie de musiques sacrées,* vol. 1, 441–453.

32. On the *nawba* and the music of the Western part of the Islamic world (*al-Maghrib*) in general, consult J. Rouanet, "La musique arabe" and "La musique

maghrebine,'' in *Encyclopédie de la Musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire,* ed. A. Lavignac and L. de la Laurencie (Paris, 1921–1931); see also, P. Garcia Barriuso, *La Musica Hispano-Musulmana en Marruecos* (Madrid, 1950).

33. In Morocco, the modes of a *nawba* are called *tubaʿ* (plural *tubuʿ*) instead of *maqam.*

34. Henri Corbin, *En Islam iranien,* cited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in ''L'Islam e la Musica secondo Ruzbahan Baqli, santo patrono di Sciraz,'' *Sufi, musiche e ceremonie dell'Islam* (Milan: Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro, 1981).

35. Ruzbihan Baqli, *Risalat al-Quds,* cited by Jean During, ''Revelation and Spiritual Audition in Islam,'' *The World of Music: Sacred Music, Journal of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation* 24, no. 3 (1982): 68–84.

36. Cited by William Chittick in *The Sufi Path of Love: the Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 326.

37. N. Caron and D. Safvate, *Iran—les Traditions musicales* (Paris, 1966) 232.

38. Jean During, ''Eléments spirituels dans la musique traditionelle iranienne contemporaine,'' *Sophia Perennis* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1975): 129–154.

39. Reinhard, *Traditions musicales: Turquie,* 105.

40. Cited by J. Sharif, *Islam in India* (London, U.K., 1975), 289.

41. Concerning the different styles of Hindustani music, consult A. Daniélou, *Northern Indian Music* (London and Calcutta, 1949–1952). The spiritual value of Indian music and the vigor that the music of Mogul India experienced under the influence of Islam have been analyzed in depth in the article by L. Aubert, ''Aperçus sur la signification de la musique indienne,'' *Revue Musicale de la Suisse romande* no. 2, (May 1981) (34th year): 50–61.

42. *Yanavalkya Smriti* cited by Whitall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (London, U.K.: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 685.

43. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ''Traditional Art as Fountain of Knowledge and Grace,'' in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 272.

10

Regaining the Center: Gardens and Thresholds

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore

It is more than coincidental that many doorways throughout the world exhibit a corresponding set of symbolic motifs that point to the One manifesting itself as duality—a duality and a world that must return to that One. The shape of this is basically a triangle, whose apex is a single point and whose lower angles indicate the masculine and feminine. This is a deeply satisfying shape, full of harmony and balance, which can represent the Divine Source and the manifested world.

This center, or apex, may be represented by a Tree of Life, the Axis Mundi, the Fountain of Immortality, a Throne, a Mountain, Royalty, a sun disc, and so on. Also, the center can refer to the Gardens of Paradise where the Tree and Fountain are located. It is interesting that in sacred structures throughout the world this Garden or sacred grove is recalled in architectural features. A church, for example, will have a cross, which corresponds to the Tree, and a baptismal font, which corresponds to the Fountain. The Sacred Mosque in Mecca has the Ka'ba or Cube, which represents the Divine Center and the well of Zam Zam, the Fountain. Atop the mountainous temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia are images of Buddha surrounded by four pools with a moat beyond.

Just as the entrance to the Gardens of Paradise is protected by two cherubim, who "keep the way of the Tree of Life" (Genesis 3:24),[1] sacred structures invariably have flanking guardians at their thresholds. One finds paired lions at the door of each Burmese Buddhist temple and sphinxes in Egypt. Over the gates to Christian churches are paired creatures, such as griffins or cherubim, on either side of Jesus or Mary. This configuration continues to be used for secular doorways, which may exhibit palmettes and vases, which again bring to mind the Garden and Fountain. Often public libraries and other institutions have guardian lions at their entranceways. In the steppes of Central Asia, the threshold to the yurt is decorated with

the image of the Tree of Life flanked by two mountain sheep, which are represented by their horns. This particular motif, which resembles a fleur-de-lis pattern, is used everywhere in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and extends to all items of daily use. According to Ananda Coomaraswamy, the guardians flanking a gateway symbolize the duality we must overcome in ourselves in order to regain the Center, or Paradise, or the Kingdom of Heaven within. This is what these particular symbols of the flanked central principle are there for—to remind us what to do and be. In the words of the German mystic Meister Eckhart, Paradise is a place where "neither virtue nor vice ever entered in."

The image of the Tree and the Fountain participates in an essential and archetypal reality that is part of the primordial makeup of humankind as a whole. Whether the Tree is an ash in the northern climes or a palm in the southern hemisphere is of no consequence. Neither does it matter if the forms attendant upon the threshold are those of sheep horns, split palmettes, or cherubim.

These threshold guardians, in fact, provide the conditions that qualify the aspirant to pass through the Threshold. The price of *theosis,* the attainment of transcendent character, is becoming a "veritable nonentity." The hero must overcome the dragons that guard the Treasure and symbolize our own failures and inadequacies. In the *Mathnawi,* Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi remarks, "Whoever is uttering 'I' or 'we' is turned back from the Door."

The moment of this Return through the Threshold to the Center is a forever that is now—the Present/Presence that is not bound in the duality of past and future.

> The Saint hath no fear, because fear is the expectation either of some future calamity or of the eventual loss of some object of desire; whereas the Saint is the "Son of His Time" (resides in the Eternal Present/Presence); he has no future from which he should fear anything and, as he hath no fear, so he hath no hope since hope is the expectation either of gaining an object of desire or of being relieved from a misfortune, and this belongs to the future; nor does he grieve because grief arises from the rigor of time, and how should he feel grief who dwells in the Radiance of Satisfaction and the Garden of Concord. [2]

NOTES

Excerpted from Viriginia Gray Henry-Blakemore, *Thy Self, the Logos: Symbolism of the Cherubim from Mesopotamia to Monticello as Understood from the Last Essays of A.K. Coomaraswamy,* forthcoming from Fons Vitae, Louisville, Kentucky. Reproduced by permission of the author and publisher. Sources for the above book include three unpublished manuscripts by Ananda Coomaraswamy: "The Guardians of the Sun Door," "Philo's Doctrine of the Cherubim," and "The Early Iconography of Sagittarius."

1. Martin Lings describes this Tree as an "outward image of the inward Tree of Immortality, which grows in the garden of the heart, and is on the axis as a gateway to the Spirit." Lings, *The Book of Certainty* (Cambridge, U.K.: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 28.

2. Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd, famous Sufi of Baghdad, ninth century CE.

11

The Islamic Garden: History, Symbolism, and the Qur'an

Emma C. Clark

In Arabia at the time of the coming of Islam in the seventh century CE, a garden was conceived as a walled orchard or vineyard (Ar. *hadiqa, rawda,* or *riyad*), and was irrigated by a channel of water or a well. The pre-Islamic hero and poet 'Antara ibn al-Shaddad recited the following verse: ''Every noble virgin bestowed her bounty upon it/and we left every enclosed garden (*hadiqa*) shining like a silver coin.''[1] However, in its most basic form, a grove of palm trees (*Phoenix dactilifera*) and a source of water—the oasis—was a garden too. For both the pre-Islamic Arabs and the early Muslims the walled garden, the *hadiqa,* was a gift of Perso-Mesopotamian civilization. Islam absorbed the already well-established Persian tradition of hunting parks and royal pleasure gardens and invested them with a new spiritual vision. It was through this vision, as portrayed in the Qur'an, that the traditional Islamic garden was born.

The first Muslims came from the deserts and towns of Arabia and Syria. The Prophet Muhammad, like most young Arab boys at that time, spent his early childhood brought up by a foster-mother from one of the nomadic desert tribes. It was believed that the demanding desert environment and nomadic way of life would instill the virtues of steadfastness, strength, and courage in boys at an early age and would stand them in good stead in adulthood. ''As desert dwellers, the notion of invisible hands that drove the blasts that swept the desert and formed the deceptive mirages that lured the traveler to his destruction was always with [the Arabs],'' writes Huston Smith, a noted scholar of comparative religion.[2] For the pre-Islamic Arabs, accustomed as they were to living in a hostile environment, the smallest amount of water or the slightest indication of nature's greenness was considered precious and sacred, its rare appearance the work of ''invisible hands.'' To them, an oasis offered mercy in water and shade. Thus, a lush garden with fountains and shade-giving trees and the gentle green everywhere—as depicted in the

descriptions of the gardens of Paradise in the Qur'an—was a symbol of ease and comfort, a veritable abode of bliss.[3] The pre-Islamic Arabs already revered nature as a sign of the life-giving power of Allah, Creator of the Universe. Thus, when the Holy Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad with its promise of gardens of Paradise for the faithful and righteous—havens of such beauty and happiness that only a foretaste and reflection of them could be experienced on Earth—it was perfectly natural for them to accept this vision.

A glance at the art and architecture of the Islamic world shows a tremendous diversity of artistic expression: the Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez, the Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo, and the Friday Mosque in Isfahan, all have rich art and artisanship adorning them. Each geographical location, with its native people, cultural characteristics, and artistic gifts, adapted the Islamic vision and principles to achieve pinnacles of art and beauty that are both reflections of the land in question and also recognizable manifestations of the Islamic spirit and this is no less true with Islamic gardens. Across the Islamic world, these gardens show a great variation of styles, reflecting practical and environmental factors, as well as indigenous cultural factors: factors such as topography, availability of water, and purpose or type of garden. However, like the other Islamic arts and architecture, despite their diversity, Islamic gardens retain the same principles and are quintessentially expressions of the same Islamic spirit.

Some Islamic gardens are vast open spaces, such as the magnificent Shalimar Bagh ("Abode of Love") in Lahore, Pakistan, with its terraces and marble pavilions, or the Shalimar Bagh in Kashmir where water rushes down, channeled from the mountains. Some gardens, like the pre-Islamic *hadiqa,* have the appearance of orchards and are also called *bustan* (the Persian word for "orchard"), for example, the Menara Garden in Marrakech, Morocco, with its olive groves and fruit trees. Then there are the great mausoleum gardens of Mogul India, such as those of Itimad ud-Dawlah or Humayun. However, our main interest in this chapter is the smaller, enclosed garden, the *chahar-bagh,* which is the type of garden that most people associate with Islam.

The classic *chahar-bagh* is a fourfold garden (from the Persian *chahar,* "four," and *bagh,* "garden") that is constructed around a central pool or fountain with four streams flowing from it, symbolizing the four directions of space. Sometimes, the water is engineered to flow from the central fountain outward as well as inward toward the center of the garden from fountains placed at the four corners—as in the Court of Lions at the Alhambra. Often, paths are substituted for channels of water. This basic fourfold pattern is the quintessential plan of the Islamic garden, and there are many interpretations of it across the Islamic world. For example, the garden might be rectangular rather than square, such as the Patio de la Acequia ("Patio of the Water-Channel") of the Generalife in Granada. The plan of the garden may also

be repeated on a kind of grid system, following irrigation channels, as in the Agdal gardens near Marrakech. The pattern may also be manifested in the smaller, inward-looking courtyard garden of the traditional Islamic house, which is not always divided into four sections. However, with its central pool or fountain and surrounded by four walls, it still echoes the classic *chahar-bagh*, both in its form and in its symbolism. As we shall see, the fourfold garden is not a symbol particular only to Islam. Rather, it is of a universal nature, and it is founded upon a profound understanding of the cosmos.

PROTOTYPES OF THE ISLAMIC GARDEN

The idea that Paradise is a garden is a very ancient one. It predates Islam, as well as Judaism and Christianity, by centuries, and appears to have its origin as far back as the Sumerian period (around 4000 BCE) in Mesopotamia. Here, a garden for the gods is mentioned in some of the first writings known to humanity. The Babylonians (*c.* 2700 BCE) described their Divine Paradise as a garden in the *Epic of Gilgamesh:* ''In this immortal garden stands the Tree... beside a sacred fount the Tree is placed.''[4] Thus, in Mesopotamian sources we already have two indispensable elements of the Paradise Garden of Islam: water and shade. In the Qur'an, the Gardens of Paradise are called *jannat al-firdaws: jannat* (plural) meaning ''gardens,'' and *firdaws* (singular) meaning ''Paradise.''[5] The word *janna* (singular) can also mean ''Paradise.'' Most of the other terms in traditional Islam that describe gardens, such as *bagh* (''garden''), *bustan* (''orchard''), and *gulistan* (''rose-garden''), are Persian words.[6] Thus, they indicate where the developed form of the Islamic garden originated. It was the unique impact of the Qur'anic revelation on the ancient Sassanid and Achaemenian civilizations of Persia with their *pairidaeza*s (walled hunting-parks) and sophisticated irrigation systems, such as those in the gardens of Cyrus the Great at Pasargardae, that ultimately brought the Islamic garden into being. The English word ''Paradise'' itself comes from the Middle Persian word *pairidaeza, pairi* meaning ''around,'' and *daeza* meaning, ''wall.''

Persian gardens and hunting-parks were distinct areas, set apart from the surrounding, often inhospitable, landscape and were usually defined by high walls. Thus, we immediately envisage an isolated region, shutting out a difficult environment to protect an area of fertility and ease within. The traditional Islamic fourfold garden is often represented in miniature paintings as surrounded by high walls. It is in the nature of Paradise to be hidden and secret, since it corresponds to the interior world, the innermost soul—the Arabic noun *al-janna* having the sense of ''concealment'' as well as of a garden.[7] This concept is similar to that of the *hortus conclusus,* the monastic garden of medieval Christendom. The courtyard of a traditional Arab-Islamic house is

a kind of *chahar-bagh* in miniature; there may not be room for many plants and flowers but there is always water, usually a small fountain or a small pool in the center with possibly one palm tree or some plants in pots. These houses are often quite high, with four stories or more and a flat roof on which one can sleep on hot summer nights, the windows rarely opening out onto the street. Instead, they look inward, usually with balconies, onto the courtyard and the miniature Paradise Garden within. On entering one of these houses, in order to maintain privacy from the street, the corridor is cleverly constructed so that it bends around, preventing passers-by from peering into the secluded family home.

The plan on which the Arab-Islamic house is based is inherited from an ancient prototype originating in Mesopotamia. Here people made maximum use of what little water was available and built their houses of mud-brick around enclosures or courtyards with water in the center. This kept the adverse conditions outside, while simultaneously creating a cooler, cleaner, and refreshing refuge within. Under Muslim direction, this architecture also reflected the separation between the public and private domains in traditional Islamic society. This distinction between public and private domains was to become one of the hallmarks of traditional Islamic architecture, and incorporated, by extension, the ‘‘interior’’ courtyard garden. The house opens inward toward the heart rather than outward toward the world. The heart, symbolically represented by the courtyard, represents the interior (*batin*), the contemplative aspect of human nature. By contrast, the modern villa-type house represents the opposite, the exterior (*zahir*) or worldly attitude.[8]

The traditional Islamic house may be in the middle of a bustling old city (*madina*)—such as Fez, Tunis, or Damascus—but when the door to the street is shut, the visitor enters a very different world. The contrast is immediate: suddenly peace and quiet descend; the high, thick stone walls keep out the noise and bestow a kind of muffled silence on the interior, not dissimilar to a church. The gentle murmur of a fountain in the center of the house draws the visitor in, contributing to the atmosphere of interiorizing reflection. At night, these small courtyards (often about six meters square or less) are quite magical. Sitting on a rug or a cushion on the stone floor, one’s gaze is inevitably drawn upward, toward the stars in the sky. It is a beautiful example of how traditional architecture can not only have an impact upon the individual soul and affect a whole society and way of life, but it is also a mirror of that society’s values.[9]

Titus Burckhardt, the great commentator on Islamic art wrote:

> If [a Muslim’s] house has no windows onto the street and is normally built around an inner court from which the rooms receive light and air, this is not simply in response to the frequently torrid climate of Muslim lands; it is clearly symbolic. In conformity with this symbolism, the inner court of a house is an

> image of paradise; when it contains a fountain and water-courses which gush forth to water trees and flowers, it does in effect recall the descriptions in the Qur'an of the abode of the blessed.[10]

THE QUR'AN AND THE GARDEN

There are many references to fountains, flowing waters, and perfect temperate climates in the descriptions of Paradise in the Qur'an, where the blessed shall be shaded by ''thornless lote-trees and serried acacias'' and ''palms and vines'' (Qur'an 56:28–34; 2:266). In hot and dry environments, water is understandably viewed as a symbol of God's mercy; rain is referred to throughout the Qur'an as a mercy and as life-giving. Indeed, there is no doubt that water in whatever form, whether a still pool, a rushing waterfall, a murmuring fountain, or a fast-flowing rill, is a key element in a traditional Islamic garden. To those brought up in countries where rain is frequent and the climate is temperate, it is all too easy to take water for granted and to be unaware of how much a lush garden with flowing water and a green canopy of shade mean to inhabitants of countries with baking-hot desert climates. It is no accident that green is the color of Islam. It is the color used repeatedly in the Qur'an to describe Paradise, where the faithful recline on ''green cushions'' (Qur'an 55:76) and wear ''green robes'' (Qur'an 18:31). Not only is green the color of vegetation, appearing young and fresh and symbolizing growth and fertility in the spring, but it is also the antithesis of the monotonous sandy-browns of the stony desert; it offers a longed-for soothing and gentle relief to the eyes.[11] A famous English gardener writing at the beginning of the twentieth century gives a very evocative description of the unavoidable heat and longing for coolness and green foliage that he experienced while trekking in Iran:

> Imagine you have ridden in summer for four days across a plain; that you have then come to a barrier of snow-mountains and ridden up that pass; that from the top of the pass you have seen a second plain, with a second barrier of mountains in the distance, a hundred miles away; that you know that beyond these mountains lies yet another plain, and another; and that for days, even weeks, you must ride with no shade, and the sun overhead, and nothing but the bleached bones of dead animals strewing the track. Then when you come to trees and running water, you will call it a garden. It will not be flowers and their garishness that your eyes crave for, but a green cavern full of shadows and pools where goldfish dart, and the sound of a little stream.[12]

In the approximately 120 references in the Qur'an to the Gardens of Paradise—the *jannat al-firdaws* that are promised for ''those who believe and do deeds of righteousness'' (Qur'an 18:107)—various epithets are attached to the word *janna* in order to describe the qualities that the

Gardens possess. For example, one finds *jannat al-khuld* (singular), the Garden of Immortality or Eternity (Qur'an 25:15); *jannat al-na'im* (plural), the Gardens of Bliss, Delight, or Felicity (Qur'an 56:12); and *jannat al-ma'wa* (plural), the Gardens of Refuge, Shelter, or Abode (Qur'an 32:19). One also finds *jannat 'Adnin* (Qur'an 18:30)—the Garden of Eden—which suggests the peace and harmony of humanity's primordial state. From these descriptive terms attached to the Arabic word *janna,* we see that the Islamic Gardens of Paradise are not only blissful and eternal, but they are also a refuge or sanctuary, a sheltered and secure retreat far from the disquiet of the world. However, the descriptive phrase most often used for the Gardens of Paradise in the Qur'an (it is used over 30 times) is *jannat tajri min tahtiha al-anhar,* "Gardens Underneath which Rivers Flow" (for example, Qur'an 61:12). Even in translation, the repetition of this phrase has a soothing rhythm to it. Closing one's eyes, it is possible to imagine sitting in a garden under dappled shade, listening to the gentle music of flowing water.

Flowing rivers and the coursing of water and fountains are the most powerful and memorable images one retains after reading the portrayals of the Paradise Gardens in the Qur'an. There is no doubt that the reason water is the essential element in an Islamic garden is both because of the lack of water in the desert lands of Arabia and because of the importance placed upon water in the Qur'an. The Almighty knew that in order to tempt His flock back to the "Straight Path" (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*),[13] He must promise them rewards in the Afterlife—such as water and shade—that they would understand and desire and that they already revered for their life-giving properties. Islam gave the first Muslims the knowledge and faith that these two elements, together with the rest of the natural world, were not to be worshipped for themselves alone but were to be revered for what they represented. Nature and beauty are the outward symbols of inward grace. Throughout the Qur'an, the faithful are exhorted to meditate upon God's signs and symbols, since everything in the created world is a sign or symbol of God. "Thus God makes clear His signs for you so that you may understand" (Qur'an 2:242). The Qur'an also refers to the mediocrity and ephemeral nature of this lower life compared to the happiness of the life everlasting and the Gardens of Paradise: "The present life is naught but a sport and a diversion" (Qur'an 47:36).

Human beings would cease to be truly *muslim,* in submission to God, if they were to revere the created world as an end in itself. The world must instead be seen for what it is—an illusion (*maya* in Hinduism) that both veils and reveals the archetypal heavenly world. When a civilization is centered on the sacred, whether it is Islamic, Native American, or medieval Christian, the practical is always inextricably linked to the spiritual. This is the language of symbolism: linking everyday practical activities back to their heavenly archetypes.[14] However, human beings are forgetful and need to be reminded

that the things of this world are not ends in themselves. The importance of sacred art lies in this truth. The Islamic garden is best seen as a kind of open-air sacred art: the content, form, and symbolic language of this art all combine to remind one of the eternal invisible realities that lie beneath outward appearances.

The following are some brief excerpts from the Qur'an that give an indication of the sense of rich abundance and blissful delight that is given by a fuller reading of the Qur'anic descriptions of the Gardens of Paradise:

> In Paradise there is ''no vain talk or lies'' (Qur'an 78:35); ''they hear no idle speech'' (Qur'an 88:11); ''they hear no vain talk or recrimination, but only the saying, 'Peace, peace''' (Qur'an 56:25).
>
> ''We shall strip away all rancor that is in their breasts; as brothers they shall be on couches, set face to face'' (Qur'an 15:47).
>
> There is a perfect temperate climate: ''Reclining therein on couches, they shall see neither [the heat of the] sun nor bitter cold'' (Qur'an 76:13).
>
> There will be cool pavilions, couches, cushions, carpets, and silk attire, ''green garments of silk and brocade'' (Qur'an 76:21).[15]
>
> Weariness is unknown in this Paradise: ''Fatigue will not come unto them there'' (Qur'an 15:48).
>
> Fruit will be in abundance; produce will be eternal, ''such fruits as they shall choose and such flesh of fowl as they desire'' will be provided (Qur'an 56:20–21).
>
> Gold and silver jewelry will be worn and sweet potions will be drunk from ''vessels of silver'' and ''goblets of crystal'' (Qur'an 76:15). The potions are of such purity that there are no after-effects, ''no brows throbbing, no intoxication'' (Qur'an 56:19).
>
> An essential element of the gardens of paradise is that they are eternal, that the righteous will be there forever, ''therein to dwell for ever; that is indeed the mighty triumph'' (Qur'an 57:12).
>
> Finally, and movingly, the Lord rewards the faithful for remembering Him on earth: ''And their Lord shall give them to drink a pure draught. Behold this is recompense for you, and your striving is thanked'' (Qur'an 76:22).

The joys and delights of the Gardens of Paradise as depicted in the Qur'an give the faithful a clear idea of the heavenly reward for their striving. These descriptions transport the reader or listener to heavenly realms, to places of infinite and surpassing peace and felicity, which only the most dedicated spiritual seekers on earth may reach. This is only achieved through the constant and sincere remembrance of God (*dhikr Allah*), through nurturing the ''garden within,'' the garden of the heart. This interior garden is the domain of the Sufis, those who concentrate on the inward or mystical aspect of Islam and who understand profoundly that the visible world is a symbol, a transient mirror image of an invisible eternal reality.[16]

SYMBOLIC GARDENS IN THE QUR'AN: *SURAT AL-RAHMAN* (55, "THE ALL-MERCIFUL")

In the Qur'an, not only are there four rivers in the Gardens of Paradise but also, in Sura 55, there are four gardens, which are described as two pairs of gardens. Sura 55 contains one of the most detailed references to the Gardens of Paradise in the Qur'an. According to some commentaries, these four gardens are divided into a lower pair, the "Garden of the Soul" and the "Garden of the Heart," which is reserved for the Righteous (*al-salihun*). The second and higher pair of gardens, the "Garden of the Spirit" and the "Garden of the Essence," is reserved for the Foremost (*al-sabiqun*), those who are closest to the Divine Presence. The first garden is covered by spreading branches and contains two flowing springs (*'aynan*), which water "every kind of fruit in pairs" (Qur'an 55:48–52). Its inhabitants recline on couches of silk brocade, with the fruit of both gardens near at hand (Qur'an 55:54). The second pair of gardens is dark green with foliage, and contains two gushing springs that water orchards of date palms and pomegranates (Qur'an 55:64–68).

Fountains in an Islamic garden are not just for coolness and beauty. They are also reminders of the archetypal springs of water that are described in this Sura. In each of these gardens is a flowing or gushing spring (*'ayn*, "source"), which indicates that Paradise is metaphysically near to the Ultimate Source (*'ayn*)—to God Himself. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, the springs of the Gardens of Paradise are named *Tasnim* (Exaltation), "a spring from which Those Brought Near to God (*al-muqarrabun*) drink" (Qur'an 83:27–28); *Salsabil* (Ever-Flowing), which gives a water mixed with fragrant ginger (Qur'an 76:18); and *Kauthar* (Abundance), which is said to be flavored with musk (Qur'an 108:1–2). The complex and profound symbolism that is contained in *Surat al-Rahman* and other passages of the Qur'an that describe the Gardens of Paradise cannot be described fully in an introductory article such as this.[17] However, the most important point to emphasize is that the fourfold form of the archetypal Islamic garden is not just a whim of design or an interesting horticultural plan, but is fundamentally a reflection of a higher reality and a universal symbol of Divine Unity.

DESIGN AND SYMBOLISM: THE NUMBER FOUR

Although the symbolism of the fourfold garden is used in other religious traditions, notably in the Christian tradition, where the monastic herb garden and the "cloister garth" spring to mind, there is still no doubt that in most people's minds the classic *chahar-bagh* layout is quintessentially Islamic. Inherent in the number four is a universal symbolism based on an understanding of the natural world. The number four encompasses the four

cardinal directions, the four elements, and the four seasons. The cube, the three-dimensional form of the number four, represents solidity, the Earth. The word *Ka'ba,* indicating the cube-like structure in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Mecca to which Muslims orient their prayers, means "cube."[18] The fourfold plan also recalls the fundamental *mandala* of the Vedic tradition, which is divided into nine squares and symbolizes the terrestrial realm. Tibetan Buddhist *tangka*s are also based on a square diagram within a circle, representing the earth encircled by heaven.

The religion of Islam reconfirmed these ancient, widespread, and universal truths, and invested them with a new spiritual understanding. In describing his visionary ascent to heaven (*mi'raj*), the Prophet Muhammad spoke of four rivers: one of water, one of milk, one of honey, and one of wine. These four rivers are also mentioned as part of the Gardens of Paradise described in the Qur'an: "Rivers of unpolluted water, rivers of milk whose flavor does not change, rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers, and rivers of purified honey" (Qur'an 47:15). This description from the Qur'an echoes the Book of Genesis, in which it is written: "And a river went out of Eden to water the garden and from thence it was parted into four heads" (Genesis 2:10).

Burckhardt's description of the Court of Lions at the Alhambra is worth quoting in full here:

> The plan of the heavenly garden always includes the four rivers of Paradise flowing towards the four quarters of Heaven, or from them towards the center. The watercourses of the Court of Lions are fed from the two halls to the north and south and from the two stone canopies at the west and east end. The floor of the halls is set higher than the garden, and so the water, which flows from round basins, runs down over the threshold towards the fountain, where it collects around the lions and soaks away.... The fountain itself, with its twelve lions supporting a basin spewing water, is an ancient symbol which reached the Alhambra from the pre-Christian Orient by way of all kinds of intermediary links. For the water-spewing lion is none other than the sun, from which life gushes forth, and the twelve lions are the twelve suns of the Zodiac, twelve months that are all present concurrently in eternity. They support a 'sea'... and this sea is the reservoir of Heavenly waters.... The stone canopies, too, at opposite ends in the east and west of the garden, are also a part of the picture of the garden of paradise, for in the description of paradise, the Qur'an mentions high canopies or tents.[19]

It is probably the case that only the master-gardeners would have been aware of the profound meanings underlying the plan and construction of the great Islamic gardens, passing on the knowledge gradually to their apprentices as they proved themselves spiritually mature. As with all traditional arts and crafts, including architecture and landscape design, a master-craftsman would have first conceived of the design of a garden and would have overseen the project as it developed. He would have worked in

close collaboration with his patron, just as the great architect Sinan did in the sixteenth century CE when designing his masterpieces in Istanbul for Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. At the Alhambra, Muhammad V was the patron who initiated the Court of the Lions and would have understood much of the profound meaning of the fourfold pattern. Interestingly, the English word "patron" comes from the Latin *patronus* and old French *patron,* meaning, "father." The term implies care and protection as well as support and guidance. The word "pattern," or model upon which a thing is designed, also has its origins in *patron* and *patronus.* This common set of meanings reinforces the idea central to the esoteric perspective (partly inherited from Plato) that everything on Earth is a symbol of its divine model or archetype in Heaven. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the Islamic gardens on earth are not only a foretaste of where the faithful may hope to go after death, but are also symbolic representations of the divine archetype, the Heavenly Gardens as presented to us in the Qur'an.

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE *CHAHAR-BAGH*

The *chahar-bagh,* based as it is on the number four, has become the principal Islamic symbol of the Qur'anic Gardens of Paradise. This model was taken up and developed all over the Islamic world. For example, in Isfahan there is a road called The Avenue of the *Chahar-Bagh,* which in earlier times was lined with several beautiful fourfold gardens. These gardens were evocatively described by Russell Page, an English gardener in the 1960s: "Perhaps the world's loveliest processional way, and almost every garden is set symmetrically round a central pool whose four subsidiary rills carry water into each quarter of the garden and then to the roots of every tree and plant."[20] Page's description is enough to make one weep, since the present-day traffic-choked street in contemporary Isfahan is very different from the enchanting scene conjured up here.

In India, some of the great mausoleum gardens were built with the tomb placed in the center of the quadripartite plan, as in the mausoleum of Humayun, or with the mausoleum placed at one end, the *chahar-bagh* stretching out in front with a pool in the center, as at the Taj Mahal. The beauty of these mausoleums and their gardens is quite breathtaking. More modest, but still enchanting, examples of *chahar-bagh*s are to be seen across the Islamic world in Morocco, Syria, Persia, and Turkey, where many courtyard gardens integral to houses and public buildings still survive. Moorish Spain saw the construction of some of the most beautiful Islamic gardens in the world. The best known of these are the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra Palace, together with the gardens of the Generalife. The gardens of the Alcazar in Cordoba also deserve special mention since, despite being in Christian hands for many hundreds of years they are still utterly Islamic in

their ambience. Clearly, the original intention of echoing the Gardens of Paradise is so closely interwoven with the fourfold geometric design and its inherent symbolic meaning that it is not possible to separate one from the other. As with most of the great Islamic gardens, there is a perfect balance and harmony between the principal elements of geometric formal design, the exuberance of the planting to soften the geometry, and the focal point of the garden: water. An important factor in the planting of the garden, besides shade and the color green, is that the garden should contain scented plants. It is mentioned in the Qur'an that sweet basil (*rayhan,* 55:12) can be found among the flowers growing in the Paradise Gardens.

In Morocco, there is a type of garden called a *riyad* that is related etymologically to the term *rawda,* a word that can mean both ''garden'' and ''cemetery'' in Arabic.[21] *Riyad* usually refers to a garden that is walled on three sides, the fourth side being the house of the garden's owner. The term may also refer to the house itself, with a walled garden at the back. In premodern times, a *riyad* more often than not contained an arbor of vines and a vegetable garden, as well as providing shade, solace, and food for the family. The name of Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, comes from the same term. In the larger Mogul and Persian gardens, as well as in the Menara Garden in Marrakech, architecture in the form of pavilions or ''kiosks'' (another Persian word) can be found, which were often placed near the water for a cooling breeze. As Constance Villiers Stuart observed in the early twentieth century CE, ''In Persia and India a house or palace is always understood to be included under the name of garden, and the whole composition was closely and beautifully interwoven.''[22] This principle of the close interweaving of the house with the garden is crucial to an understanding of the sense of unity fundamental to all Islamic design.

WATER

''Gardens Underneath which Rivers Flow'': the idea of water flowing underneath the Gardens of Heaven probably arose from the demands of a desert existence, where the only source of water for most of the year was from oases or underground irrigation systems such as the *qanat*s in Persia.[23] In the gardens themselves, water is to be seen and experienced; in order to irrigate the flower-beds, it has to flow in straight channels and rills, often under the pathways, thereby giving the visitor the impression of actually being in a garden ''underneath which rivers flow.'' On a more profound level, water flowing underneath suggests the nurturing of the ''garden within'' or the ''Garden of the Heart'' by the ever-flowing water of the spirit, which serves to purify the souls of those on the spiritual path (*al-tariqa*). Indeed, water is symbolic of the soul in many sacred traditions. Its fluidity and constantly purifying aspect is a reflection of the soul's ability to renew itself, yet always

to remain true to its source. The apparently endlessly flowing waters in the gardens of the Alhambra Palace and the nearby Generalife are some of the most evocative representations of the Islamic Gardens of Paradise anywhere in the world. The sound of water not only muffles the voices of the visitors, but it also has the miraculous effect of silencing one's own thoughts and allowing an overwhelming sense of peace to descend.

One glance at traditional Islamic gardens shows that, besides their geometric layout, they all have a fundamental element in common: water. Water, as already observed, is the single most defining element in an Islamic garden. Just as there are rivers and fountains in the Gardens of Paradise, so there are rivers, or rather channels or rills, and at least one fountain, in the earthly gardens. Indeed, in many cases it is true to say that the geometric layout of a garden has been determined by the practical demands of irrigation, by the water-flow itself. In a traditional culture, as pointed out above, there is no clear distinction between what is carried out for practical purposes and its spiritual significance: they go hand in hand.

Inventive devices in Persian gardens that are designed for distributing water or increasing the aesthetic experience of water include the *chador* (literally "shawl" in Persian, as in a "shawl of water"), a stone slab carved with geometric patterns so that the water breaks up into patterns as it falls over it. There is also the *chabutra,* a stone-seating platform that allows one who sits in a garden to be surrounded by water; this is a wonderful aid in meditation. One may see too a *chini-khana* (literally, "china cabinet"), rows of small niches carved into stone, within which a flower or a candle in a jar may be placed and over which the water falls. When such devices are combined with imaginative yet subtle lighting at dusk, it is no wonder that visitors from beyond Muslim lands are so often enchanted by the Islamic garden, such as the Russian prince who described the Shalimar Bagh in Lahore in 1842:

> The whole garden was illuminated from the edges of the fountains and water channels to the branches of the orange trees. Globes of coloured glass placed behind these candles tinged the sparkling water green or red. Add to all of this continuous fireworks, the magnificent warlike courtiers, the garden with its walks covered with Kashmiri shawls with the horses trampling upon them, the intoxicating smell of the orange blossom, and the even more intoxicating movements of the dancing girls. One felt inclined to say like Poor Tom in King Lear, "God keep us in our five senses."[24]

PEACE

It is written in the Qur'an that the only word spoken in the Gardens of Paradise is "Peace." "[In the Garden] they hear neither vain speaking nor recrimination, nothing but the saying 'Peace, Peace'" (Qur'an 56:25–26). Therefore, one of the principal functions of the earthly "Gardens of

Paradise'' is to provide a place of tranquility and harmony, a retreat from the world, where the soul can let go of distracting thoughts and be at peace. The word *Islam* is related to the Arabic root S-L-M, which primarily means ''peace.'' When taken together with its actual root, *aslama* (''to surrender, to give oneself over to another''), Islam thus means ''the peace that comes when one's life is surrendered to God.''[25] The traditional greeting used across the world by all Muslims, irrespective of race, nationality, color, background, or age, is *As-Salamu 'alaykum,* ''Peace be upon you.'' The reply is, *Wa 'alaykum assalam,* ''And upon you be Peace.'' Thus, when two Muslims greet each other, they echo the greeting that is given in the Gardens of Paradise. There is something extraordinarily beautiful about the courtesy, dignity, and sobriety of this greeting, which is both warm and reserved at the same time. It is warm because as two human beings before God, whatever our station in life, we acknowledge each other respectfully and as equals. It is reserved because the greeting requires no further communication; discretion and privacy are maintained and nothing further need be said.

Thus, when we read in the Qur'an that no words are spoken in the Gardens of Paradise except ''Peace'' (*Salam*), this seems perfectly natural. The human search for Paradise on Earth is essentially a search for peace, not just peace from the world, but peace from our passional soul (*nafs*), the ego and its desires—so that we may repose in our immortal soul.

The much-misused Arabic word *jihad* literally means ''struggle'' or ''effort'' and can take many forms, such as a *jihad* against intolerance and discrimination. However, according to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, the greater *jihad* (*al-jihad al-akbar)* is the ''war'' within our own selves. This jihad is the struggle to transform the negative and egocentric motivations within us and to nurture positive ones. By the grace of God, this effort will eventually be rewarded by inner contentment and peace. Our longing for serenity of soul is like a vague memory of our primordial nature (*fitra* in Arabic), when the human being was at peace with the Creator in the Garden of Eden and therefore at peace with the soul. In order to regain this primordial Paradise, those who are seriously committed to the spiritual path of Islam must reach the state of constant remembrance of God (*dhikr Allah*). Few would argue that it is easier to nurture this contemplative state when surrounded by the beauties of nature or when sitting in a garden designed and planted with spiritual symbolism in mind. The traditional Islamic garden, providing as it does a sanctuary from the world and a foretaste of the Gardens of Paradise, can be a powerful aid in this remembrance.

DIVINE UNITY

The doctrine of Divine Unity (*tawhid*) is the profound message of the Qur'an that penetrates every aspect of a practicing Muslim's life. It also

underpins Islamic art, architecture, and garden design. Beyond the different components of a garden—water, planting, geometry, and architecture—lies this secret force that draws them all together in a satisfying and harmonious composition. After spending some time contemplating a garden that exemplifies these principles, such as the Patio de la Acequia at the Generalife Gardens in Granada, or the smaller *chahar-bagh* in the Alacazar of Cordoba, the visitor will begin to understand that it is this secret force of *tawhid* that lies behind the sense of unity that gives an Islamic garden its special contemplative quality. This evocation of Divine Unity is evident in all traditional Islamic gardens, whether it is the magnificent Bagh-i-Fin in the Iranian city of Kashan, or one of the great mausoleum gardens of India, or the more intimate courtyard gardens of Damascus or Fez. "In Islamic art, unity is never the result of a synthesis of component elements; it exists *a priori,* and all the particular forms are deduced from it; the total form of a building or interior exists before its parts, whether they have a static function or not."[26]

After spending many hours absorbing the atmosphere of the Patio de la Acequia in the Generalife, the Court of the Myrtles and other courtyards of the Alhambra Palace, and the Azem Palace courtyards in Damascus, a realization became clear to me. For the first time, I became fully aware of the profound understanding that the Muslim designers and craftsmen of these gardens had of the harmonious relationship between architecture, geometric planning, water, and planting. All expressed the unity of the whole. I had no doubt that this understanding came about because their designers' whole way of living was permeated by *tawhid,* the central message of the Qur'an. This factor more than any other made possible their astonishing achievements in the art of garden design.

The essence of the concept of Divine Unity in Islam is the awareness that "There is no divinity but God." This statement, the first part of the *Shahada,* the Muslim testimony of faith, may also be rendered, "There is no reality but the Reality." In other words, the only reality is God. Thus, for the Muslim, existence is centered entirely on the consciousness of Divine Unity. This means that everything in the created world is transparent: behind the ephemeral beauty of the outward form, one can discern the ineffable spirit within. This eternal and transcendent quality gives the world of nature and all of manifestation their meaning: all else passes away. As Burckhardt observed:

> The most profound link between Islamic art and the Qur'an…lies not in the form of the Qur'an but in its *haqiqah,* its formless essence, and more particularly in the notion of *tawhid,* unity or union, with its contemplative implications; Islamic art—by which we mean the entirety of plastic arts in Islam—is essentially the projection into the visual order of certain aspects or dimensions of Divine Unity.[27]

TRADITION

The merging of the sacred and the secular is a crucial part of traditional Islamic culture, as it is of all traditional cultures. Tradition entails the "handing-over" of precious learning from one generation to another, which can be traced back to its ultimate source in Divine Revelation. However, Islamic gardens were not just for evoking the Unity of the Divine. They were also for pleasure and lovemaking, for political discussions and parties, and for growing vegetables and fruits. They were also for rest and refuge, and for delighting in the cooling and soothing properties of water. They were for enjoying the aesthetic and sensory delights of flowers, the scent of blossoms, the songs of the birds, and the protective shade of trees. However, all these things were enjoyed, not just for their sake alone, but also in the understanding that they were both a taste and a reflection of the joy and bliss of the Heavenly Gardens.

Thus, when one author writes, "the conclusion that the Qur'an supplied the blueprint for Islamic gardens is methodologically fallacious,"[28] she is correct in the sense that the Qur'an did not offer a "blueprint," a practical guide for measuring out one's garden as the Bible instructed Noah how to build the Ark. However, the Qur'an did offer something incommensurably deeper and more powerful than a blueprint. It offered the inward dimension, the idea behind the blueprint: the *haqiqa,* the Truth. This Truth was contained in the Divine Revelation of the Qur'an with its emphasis on *Tawhid* or Unity. When combined with a knowledge and love of the natural world, as well as the universal forms inherited from ancient civilizations, it resulted in the creation of a new art, an art that was all the more beautiful because it was true. One of the most important factors that make "Traditional" art traditional is that it is has a meaning: it performs some function, whether symbolic or practical, besides being aesthetically pleasing.[29] "Art for art's sake" has no place in the traditional world. The fact that *janna* means both garden and Paradise is indicative in itself of this lack of distinction between the sacred and the profane.

Never before in the history of humankind have there been such enormous and densely populated urban areas as there are today; and never before has there been such an intense desire to escape these areas—usually through travel to remote places "untouched" by humans—but also, on a smaller scale, through creating gardens. Increasingly, people are attempting to create their own miniature Paradise Gardens, green and secluded places that soothe the soul. These gardens are not only places of peace and quiet that are beautiful to behold, but they are also (often unconsciously) a recreation of the Heavenly Garden, itself reflected within all of us—our inner garden: "Look for the garden within yourself, in your indestructible divine Substance, which will then give you a new and imperishable garden."[30]

NOTES

(Ed.) following a note signifies that the note was added by the general editor of this set.

1. See Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d.), vol. 10, 38–39. This early dictionary from the 13th century CE clearly indicates that for the pre-Islamic Arabs, a garden was a walled orchard that contained date palms or irrigated vineyards. (Ed.)

2. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (New York and San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 236.

3. See especially, Qur'an 55, *Surat al-Rahman,* which will be examined in more detail below.

4. A little later (c. 1500 BCE), a garden was also the symbol of the Afterlife for the ancient Egyptians, who often placed models of gardens in their tombs.

5. The Qur'anic term *firdaws* is an Arabized version of the Middle Persian *pardis,* meaning, "garden." Thus, the plural term *jannat al-firdaws* literally means, "Gardens of the Garden," in other words, the quintessential or primordial garden. *Gana* is the Hebrew term for garden, as in *Ganat Aden,* "Garden of Eden." *Pardes* also appears in Jewish mystical texts before the coming of Islam. (Ed.)

6. The word *gul* is used as a general term for "flower" in Persian, as well as specifically for the rose. An abstracted version (the essential form) of the rose is the dominant motif in many tribal carpets from Baluchistan to Anatolia, through to the wide range of Turkomen rugs and carpets.

7. Titus Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain* (Munich: George D.W. Callwey, 1970); English translation by Alisa Jaffa (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 209–210.

8. A friend made a parallel observation recently: While congregations have dwindled to an all-time low in many—if not most—churches and cathedrals in Europe, these buildings are still beautifully maintained and conserved and are lit up by floodlights from without. Paradoxically, it seems that as the "inner light" diminishes, the outer light increases. Is this another sign of the times?

9. On a recent radio program in the United Kingdom (BBC Radio 4, 14 September 2005) something that our ancient forbears understood well was acknowledged as if it were a new discovery: the environments we construct for ourselves have a powerful effect on our health and well-being.

10. Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam, Language and Meaning* (London, U.K.: World of Islam Publishing Company, 1976), 91.

11. In a *hadith qudsi* (non-Qur'anic divine saying) it is recorded, "Tomorrow I shall make their eyes delight in My Gardens." The key phrase in this tradition literally means, "cool their eyes," suggesting the healing effect of the color green on eyes that have become tired and sore after the heat of the desert. See *Divine Sayings: The Mishkat al-Anwar of Ibn ʿArabi, 101 Hadith Qudsi,* Arabic Text and English Translation by Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt, (Oxford, U.K.: Anqa Publishing, 2004), 59 and Part 2, endnote.

12. Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Tehran,* quoted by John Brookes in *Gardens of Paradise: History and Design of the Great Islamic Gardens* (London, U.K.: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), 13.

13. A term from the *Fatiha,* the opening *Sura* (chapter) of the Qur'an, which Muslims recite in each of the five daily prayers.

14. This point was captured beautifully by the poet Saadi of Shiraz (d. 1292 CE), who wrote: "To the eye of the discerning man, every leaf upon a growing tree is a book imparting knowledge of our Creator." *Poems from the Persian,* trans. J.C.E. Bowen (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell and Company, 1958), 53.

15. Following the teachings of the Hadith, it is traditional for Muslim men not to wear silk or gold; along with wine, these are saved for Paradise.

16. See, for example, Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence* (Cambridge, U.K.: Quinta Essentia, 1991), 67. Al-Ghazali, the great eleventh-century Persian scholar and theologian, defined symbolism as "the science of the relation between multiple levels of reality."

17. For further information on the Gardens of Paradise, see Emma Clark, *"Underneath which Rivers Flow": The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden* (London, U.K.: The Prince of Wales' Institute of Architecture, 1996). For a fuller explanation of *Surat al-Rahman,* see Abu Bakr Siraj al-Din, *The Book of Certainty* (Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992); see also, Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy,* trans. J. Peter Hobson (London, U.K.: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), chap. 12.

18. The roots of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all start with the Prophet Abraham, father of Ishmael and Isaac. It was Abraham and Ishmael who built the Ka'ba at Mecca, the place toward which Muslims turn in their five daily prayers. The Ka'ba is symbolically the centre of the world for Muslims; its shape is almost exactly a cube. The circle that pilgrims trace in their circumambulation of the Ka'ba represents Heaven and the Ka'ba itself represents the Earth. Thus, through performing this symbolic rite, human beings reaffirm their role as the link between Heaven and Earth and as Heaven's representatives on Earth.

19. Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain,* 209.

20. See Russell Page, *The Education of a Gardener* (London, U.K.: Penguin Edition, 1983), chap. 2.

21. The term, *rawda,* is applied specifically to the small area in the Prophet's Mosque at Medina between the Prophet Muhammad's tomb and the pulpit (*minbar*). It is called this because of the saying of the Prophet, "Between my house and my pulpit is a garden (*rawda*) of the Gardens of Paradise." Today, when worshippers visit the Prophet's Mosque at Medina, this area is always the most crowded, since everyone longs to be with the Prophet in his Paradise Garden.

22. Constance Villiers Stuart, *Gardens of the Great Mughals* (London, U.K.: A. & C. Black, 1913), 42.

23. It was only after visiting Iran and spending time in cafes at the foot of the Elborz Mountains north of Tehran that I really began to understand the importance of water and shade, and to absorb the atmosphere of what an Islamic garden means. Here, fast-running streams are straddled by cheap metal divans on which are placed rugs and cushions so that the visitor can sit cross-legged or lie on them and wait to

be served with watermelon, tea, and perhaps a *shisha* or an *argileh* (water-pipe). One sinks back into the cushions, looking up at the leaves of the *chenar* tree (*Platanus orientalis*) filtering the sunlight, and listening to the sound of water running over the pebbles below. At such times, the phrase from the Qur'an, ''Gardens underneath which rivers flow,'' is brought alive. This experience is truly a foretaste of the Paradise Gardens that Muslims and others too no doubt, hope to be their final resting-place.

24. Quoted by Sajjad Kausar in *Shalamar Garden, Lahore: Landscape, Form and Meaning* (Islamabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Ministry of Culture, Pakistan, 1990), 74.

25. Smith, *The World's Religions,* 222.

26. Burckhardt, *Art of Islam,* 75.

27. Ibid., 46.

28. See D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 218–219.

29. William Morris, the principal figure of the Arts and Crafts Movement, understood this point very well. His dictum, ''Everything in the home should be both useful and beautiful'' is a faint echo of the traditional perspective.

30. Frithjof Schuon, *The Transfiguration of Man* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1995), 103.

12

The Qur'anic Symbolism of Water

Martin Lings

In the Qur'an, the ideas of mercy and water—in particular, rain—are in a sense inseparable. With them must be included the idea of Revelation (*tanzil*), which means literally "a sending down." The Revelation and the rain are both "sent down" by God the All Merciful. Both Revelation and rain are described throughout the Qur'an as "mercy" and both are spoken of as "life-giving." So close is the connection of ideas that rain might even be said to be an integral part of the Revelation, which it prolongs, as it were, in order that by penetrating the material world the divine mercy may reach the uttermost confines of creation.[1] To perform the religious rite of ablution with water is to identify oneself, in the world of matter, with this wave of mercy, and to return with it as it ebbs back toward the principle, for purification is a return to our origins. Islam—literally "submission"—is not other than nonresistance to the pull of the current of this ebbing wave.

The origin and end of this wave lie in the Treasuries (*khaza'in*) of Water, which are "with Him [God]" (Qur'an 15:21). The Treasuries of Mercy are also spoken of in just the same terms, and it is clear that these treasuries are no less than the supreme source of mercy Himself, *al-Rahman,* God the Infinitely Good. The Qur'an also speaks of its own archetype, the "Mother of the Book" (Qur'an 13:39), which is divine omniscience, this treasury cannot be set apart from those of mercy, for it likewise belongs to *al-Rahman,* who is the source of the Book: "The Infinitely Good taught the Qur'an" (Qur'an 55:1). We have already seen the connection between mercy and comprehension, and the Treasuries of Water comprise both of these aspects of *al-Rahman,* for water is a symbol of knowledge as well as well of mercy. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali remarks in *Mishkat al-Anwar* ("The Niche of Lights") with regard to the verse, "[God] sends down water from heaven, so that valleys are in flood with it, each according to its capacity" (Qur'an 13:17), that the commentaries tell us that the "water" is Gnosis[2] and that the "valleys" are hearts.

The differentiation here is in the varying capacities of the valleys, not in the water itself, which comes directly from above and has yet to undergo the influences of soil, stone, or mineral. But water which comes up from the earth is in fact differentiated, so that it symbolizes different aspects of knowledge as in the following verse of the Qur'an: "And when Moses asked for water for his people, we said: 'Strike with thy staff the rock.' And there gushed forth from it twelve springs, and everyone knew his drinking place" (Qur'an 2:60). The differentiation here is not only in the drinkers but also in what they drink. The last five words of this verse are quoted throughout Islamic literature to refer, beyond their literal meaning, to the fact that everyone who "drinks" from the Qur'an is aware of the particular standpoint that has been providentially allotted to him whether it be that of ritual law, for example, dogmatic theology, or mysticism. It is not out of line with the literal meaning of the verse, if one remembers that in ancient Israel, each of the 12 tribes had its own particular function.

When the Qur'an tells us that at the creation, "[God's] Throne was upon the water" (Qur'an 11:7), it affirms implicitly two waters, one above the Throne and one beneath it, since the tenant of the throne is *al-Rahman* (God the Infinitely Good), with Whom are the Treasuries of Water, or rather who constitutes Himself these treasuries. This duality, the waters of the unmanifest and the waters of manifestation, is the prototype of the duality within creation of the "two seas," which are so often mentioned in the Qur'an.[3] These two seas, one sweet and fresh, the other salt and bitter (Qur'an 25:53), are, respectively, Heaven and Earth, which were originally "of one piece" (Qur'an 21:30). Parallel to this and in a sense based on it, is the Sufi symbolism of ice, for salt water and ice, both representing the nontranscendent, are "gross," albeit in different ways, when compared with fresh water. It is also true that the ocean, as the vastest of things in the entire terrestrial globe, has an altogether transcendent significance. When the Qur'an says, "If the sea were ink for the words of thy Lord, the sea would be used up before the words of the Lord were used up" (Qur'an 18:109), it is saying that the symbol is not to be compared with that which it symbolizes, namely, the "Mother of the Book," the Sea of which is in fact vast enough to contain the words of God. Nonetheless, by choosing material seas rather than any other earthly thing for this demonstration, the Qur'an affirms that they are, for the infinitude of the Divine Wisdom, the symbol of symbols; they have this symbolism in virtue of their size, apart from and, as it were, despite their saltiness, for salt water as such is always transcended by fresh water.

The significance of a symbol varies according to whether it is considered as an independent entity or in relation to some other symbol. In relation to wine, water—even fresh water—may represent the untranscendent or the less transcendent, as for example, when the Qur'an mentions that in Paradise the elect are given wine to drink whereas the generality of the faithful drink from

fountains of water. This relationship between wine and water is analogous to the relationship between the sun and the moon, for wine is in a sense "liquid fire" or "liquid light"; but fire and water, inasmuch as both are elements, are on the same plane, and it is possible to consider wine and water as equal complements. Thus, in another description of Paradise, the Qur'an mentions rivers of water and rivers of wine (for example, Qur'an 47:15), without specifying any difference of level. Here it may be said that wine, being "warm," has the "subjective" significance of Gnosis in relation to the cold "objectivity" of water, which represents the Truth, the object of Gnosis. But when considered by itself, water has a total significance that transcends the distinction between subject and object, or that includes both subject and object, for inasmuch as it can be drunk, water is a symbol of Truth "subjectivized." That is, Gnosis and water can indeed claim to be "the drink of drinks." In any case, whatever the drink, water is always its basis.

The following passage of the Qur'an, the first part of which has already been quoted in connection with Gnosis, is particularly important for its illustration of the difference between the true and the false, or reality and illusion: "He sends down water from Heaven so that the valleys are in flood with it, each according to its capacity, and the flood bears the swelling foam" (Qur'an 13:17). Thus, God coins the symbols of reality and illusion. "As for the foam, it goes as scum upon the banks, and as for what profits men, it remains in the earth" (Qur'an 13:17). In light of this imagery—of the scum, which remains visible, and the water, which disappears—we may interpret the Qur'anic verse, "They know only an outward appearance of this lower life" (Qur'an 30:7). The "outward appearance" is the scum of illusion, whereas what escapes us in this world is the hidden water of Reality. We see here the significance of the fountain, which holds such an important place in Qur'anic symbolism. The bursting forth of a spring—that is, the reappearance of heaven-sent water that has become hidden—signifies the sudden unveiling of Reality, which transcends outward appearance, and the drinking of which is Gnosis. But in addition to this objective–subjective symbolism, the fountain also has the purely subjective significance of the sudden opening of an eye, which is implicit in the Arabic word *'ayn,* which means both "eye" and "fountain" [or "spring"]. This subjective symbolism is in a sense more important, because the reason why men see only the scum of illusion is that their hearts are hardened; in other words, "the eye of the heart" is closed, "for verily it is not the sight that is blind but the hearts that are blind" (Qur'an 22:47). In one highly suggestive passage, the Qur'an compels us to envisage the possibility of a fountain springing from the heart: "Then even after that, your hearts grew hard so that they were like rocks, or even harder, for verily there are rocks from which rivers gush forth, and there are rocks which split asunder so that water flows from them" (Qur'an 2:74).

The presence of "a barrier beyond which they pass not" (Qur'an 55:20) between the two seas means that the waters of this world are unable to

overflow into the next world and that the upper waters refrain from utterly overwhelming the lower waters. Instead, they allow them to exit as a seemingly separate domain without undue interference from above, at any rate "for a while"—to use the Qur'anic phrase, which is so often repeated to denote the impermanence of this world and everything in it. "Undue" is a necessary reservation, because the upper waters by their very nature cannot altogether be kept out of the lower waters, any more than water—to revert to the Sufi symbolism—can be kept out of ice. The upper waters, being the original substance of all creation, not only surround but also penetrate this world as its secret reality, to which it will eventually return. Thus, although the rain, symbolizing this penetration, is only sent down "in due measure," it is nonetheless the herald or portent of the hour—that is, the last day, when the barrier will be removed and the upper waters will flood this world, transforming its nature and causing the resurrection of the dead, for they are Waters of Life.[4]

Until then, any presence of life in this world means that a drop of these waters has passed the barrier, but this possibility is limited. "Verily, this lower life is but as water, which we have sent down from the sky" (Qur'an 10:24). Life is altogether transcendent in relation to this world, where it exists merely as a fleeting loan, ready to "evaporate" back whence it came as water evaporates back to the sky. Life is a passing trespass of the Beyond in the domain of the here below, a brief penetration of soul and body by the Spirit.[5] However, the Spirit is not "at home" in this world—hence the extreme precariousness of life—whereas it is indeed at home in the Beyond: "Verily, the Abode of the Hereafter, that is Life, did they but know" (Qur'an 29:64).[6]

If it were asked how this symbolism of water could be reconciled with the Earth-depopulating Flood, it must be remembered that although rainfall set the Flood in motion, the actual cataclysm is represented in the Qur'an as a stormy sea. One of Noah's sons who was drowned is said to have been swept away by a wave: agitated water is a symbol of vanity and illusion, the waves being images of accident and vicissitude, which are unreal in relation to the water itself, whose true nature they are powerless to affect.[7] It is significant that in the Verse of Darkness (Qur'an 24:40), which follows close on the better-known Verse of Light (Qur'an 24:35), the works of the infidels, having just been likened in their vanity to "a mirage in the desert which the thirsty man supposes to be water" (Qur'an 24:39), are then likened to water that has become "by accident" so remote from its true nature as to be comparable to a mirage—namely a dark, storm-tossed sea. This passage may even be taken as an inexplicit description of the Flood. In any case, there is no doubt that the waves of the flood and the waves of the Red Sea, which crashed down upon the pursuers of the Children of Israel, are a just "payment in kind" for the passionate perversity of Noah's contemporaries and of Pharaoh and his ministers. On the other hand, as regards what set the Flood in motion, the symbolism of rain is here tempered and conditioned

by the number forty, which signifies death or a change of state.[8] Thus, the purifying aspect of water may be said to take precedence here over its life-giving aspect. The Earth was to be purified for a new state as the Children of Israel were to be purified by 40-years' wandering in the desert. We may also compare the purification of Lent. The waters of the Flood were an inseparable part of the Revelation made to Noah of a new religion—which is symbolized by the Ark—and as such, were waters of mercy.

Any manifestation of the Transcendent is bound to be terrible for those who refuse it, for it serves to gauge the extreme hardness of their hearts. On the other hand, for those whose hearts are not hardened, the Transcendent is always awe-inspiring; this aspect of mercy is expressed by thunder, which so often precedes the rain. "He it is who shows you the lightning, a fear and longing, and raises the heavy clouds. And the thunder extols and praises Him, as do the angels for awe of Him" (Qur'an 13:12–13).

The awe-inspiring and mysterious transcendence of the upper waters, as also their life-giving aspect, is stressed in the strange and elliptical story of Moses and al-Khidr (Qur'an 18:60–82). Moses says to Joshua: "I will not cease until I reach the meeting place of the two seas" (Qur'an 18:60). They start out as for a long journey, but they stop at a rock, which is, unknown to them, that barrier that separates the two seas. Joshua sets down for a moment the provisions he has brought, which consist of dried fish. Whether because of the extreme nearness of the Waters of Life, or because a drop of these waters actually falls on the fish, it suddenly comes to life, slips from the rock, and swims away in the sea. Moses does not notice this; and the attention of Joshua who does notice it, is immediately distracted by Satan, so that he does not mention it to Moses, and they set off once more. At length Moses, exhausted by the journey, suggests that they stop to eat. Joshua remembers that their food is gone and tells Moses about the miracle of the fish. Moses understands that the rock must have been the meeting place of the two seas, and so they retrace their steps. When they regain the rock, they find there "one of [God's] slaves unto whom We had given mercy from Our mercy and knowledge from Our knowledge" (Qur'an 18:65). This person is not named, but the commentaries tell us that it is al-Khidr, the immortal Prince of the Solitary Ones (*al-afrad*).[9] The symbolism of this meeting with Moses is parallel to the symbolism of the meeting of the two seas. The salt sea of this world represents, like Moses, exoteric knowledge, whereas the Waters of Life are personified by al-Khidr.[10] "Moses said unto him: 'May I follow you so that from what you have been taught you may teach me right guidance?' He said: 'Verily you cannot be patient with me, for how should you be patient in respect of that which is beyond the compass of your experience?' He said: 'God wiling, you shall find me patient, nor will I gainsay you in anything.' He said: 'Then if you go with me, question me not, until of myself I mention it to you'" (Qur'an 18:66–70).

They set out together, and al-Khidr performs three acts of mercy in disguise; but Moses, seeing only the ‘‘scandalous’’ outside of these acts, is too outraged not to expostulate each time. The third time, al-Khidr refuses to let Moses accompany him any further; but he explains, before they part company, the true nature of his actions. To consider this passage in any detail would be beyond the scope of our subject; but it has at least given us a glimpse of the deviousness of the exoteric path and the extreme nearness of the Waters of Life. For we are already, if only we knew it, at ‘‘the meeting place of the two seas’’—witness the miracle of life that is always with us, both in us and about us, but for which the powers of illusion persuade us to take entirely for granted.

In setting before us this strange example of inadvertence and forgetfulness in respect of the marvelous incident of the fish, the Qur’an lays bare the general obtuseness of man’s attitude toward life. There is only one life, that of the Living, in varying degrees of radiation, with a mere difference of intensity between the elixir that is strong enough to quicken a dried fish and the less strong elixir that suffices to enable the living to continue to ‘‘eke out for awhile’’ their precarious earthly existence. It is thus grossly disproportionate to marvel at the one and to remain unmoved by the other. There can be no true wisdom that does not include the enlightenment of seeing life as the miracle that it is, a supernatural interference that cannot be claimed by nature as a purely natural phenomenon. Shaikh Ahmad al-‘Alawi (d. 1934) tells us that the divine mystery and miracle of life eludes us because of its extreme transcendence. It is with us, and yet at the same time it is utterly beyond us.[11] The spiritual path is in one sense not so much a journey as a gradual attunement of the soul to the presence of the Spirit, a gradual reconciliation between the natural and the supernatural, between the lower waters and the upper waters, between mind and intellect, and between Moses and al-Khidr.

In conclusion, let us consider another relevant passage, which is from the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Qur’an 27:23–44). Solomon sends for the Queen in order to convert her to the true religion, and while she and her retinue are on their way, he says to his surrounding assembly of men and jinn: “Which of you will bring me her throne before they come unto me in surrender’’ (Qur’an 27:38)? The throne is immediately set before him, and he gives instructions for it to be disguised:

> Disguise her throne for her; we shall see if she is on the right path, or if she is of those who are not rightly guided. And when she came it was said unto her: ‘‘Is your throne like unto this?’’ She said: ‘‘It is as if it were it.’’ And Solomon reflected, “We had been given knowledge before her and had surrendered unto God; and she was barred from it by what she was wont to worship apart from God. Verily, she was from a disbelieving people.’’ She was told: ‘‘Enter the courtyard.’’ And when she saw it she reckoned it to be a pool of water and bared

her legs. He said: "It is a courtyard made smooth with glass." She said: "Oh my Lord, verily I have done wrong unto my soul, and I surrender with Solomon unto God, the Lord of the Worlds."

(Qur'an 27:41–44)

The gist of what this exceedingly elliptical narration tells us is that Solomon puts Bilqis—for so the Queen of Sheba is named—to two tests. She fails in both, but her failure dissolves altogether her resistance to the Truth. This in itself would require no comment. It is true that the mistakes in question are, on the surface, totally innocent. Moreover, as regards the throne, she appears to see at least partially through the disguise, since otherwise her answer would have been simply, "No." Nonetheless, it is easily imaginable that the consciousness of being mistaken might well have a profound effect upon the soul, out of all proportion to the nature of her error. However, the apparent simplicity of the facts is belied by the gravity of the Qur'an's comments on them, and the depth of the conclusions that are drawn. We are obliged to suspect that it is not merely a question of error as such, but that the particular nature of the error is all-important.

In both cases, it is a question of the failure to penetrate through a disguise. What Solomon says about his purpose in disguising the throne could be glossed: we shall see if she penetrates to the truth of things or if she is one of those who stop short at the "scum" of illusion. This gloss could also be applied to the other disguise, that of the courtyard. The "scum" in this case is the illusion that water is present when in fact it is absent. But what is the knowledge that Solomon was given "before her," and of which the condition is that he had "surrendered unto God?" It could not simply be what the words literally suggest—his knowledge that the throne was in fact that of Sheba, and that the courtyard was in fact paved with glass. Such knowledge was no more credit to him than the lack of it was a discredit to her. But we are given a key in the reason why "she was barred from it," namely, her worship of false gods. It was because she had taken illusion to be reality that she took reality to be illusion; that is, she had taken identity to be a mere deceptive likeness. Having demonstrated this last error—for although the Qur'an does not say so, we must assume that Solomon tells her that the throne is in fact hers and that what she had thought to be no more than a vague resemblance is indeed identity—he proceeds to demonstrate the opposite error that is its cause, which is her worship of false gods, her imagining divinity to be present when in fact it was absent. Here lies undoubtedly what might be called the allegorical meaning of the above-quoted verses. We must remember that when this passage was revealed, the Prophet Muhammad was undergoing great difficulties for the very reason that the chief men of Mecca were blinded to the presence of truth in his message by their erroneous belief that the truth was present elsewhere, in their own worship of false gods. There are many

other passages in the Qur'an that likewise recount a historical incident that is, in one way or another, analogous to the situation of early seventh-century Arabia. Solomon here stands for the Prophet, and Bilqis sums up in herself the erring leaders of the clans of [the Prophet's tribe] Quraysh, who would not surrender to the One True God because of their involvement with a plurality of false gods. But this allegorical admonition to the chieftains of Mecca and example of repentance that it holds out to them leaves room for a deeper interpretation that throws light on some of the details that the allegory does not account for.

The Supreme Throne is below [God] its Tenant, but by inverse analogy every earthly throne may be said to transcend the king who sits on it, as is seen figured in the Seal of Solomon, if we take the apex of a triangle to be the tenant and its base the throne. Significant of the throne's transcendence is its oneness and permanence: kings come and go but their throne remains, ideally forever unchanged. The question of the throne of Sheba is not a part of the Qur'anic narrative that is directly relevant to our theme; but it cannot be set to one side, for it serves to bring out a point of general importance, namely, that a symbol that represents the Transcendent may be said to open out virtually onto the Absolute Transcendent.[12] The higher of the two seas is, strictly speaking, no more than the uppermost part of the created universe. However, the Waters of Life, as seen from below, are merged with the Treasuries of Water—that is, with the Infinite Beatitude. Since there is a certain analogy between the pairs Heaven–Earth (''the two seas'') and Throne–King, the throne may be said to signify not merely the mandate of heaven, but also the source of that mandate, the Divine King, and thus ultimately the Supreme Self.

In considering Solomon's first test, it must not be forgotten that Bilqis is a queen. Her first lapse has thus to be defined, in all accuracy, as that of a queen who fails to recognize her own throne, and seen in this light it takes on a more serious aspect. Moreover, like the lapse of Moses and Joshua with regard to the miracle of the quickening of the dried fish, the incident of the throne has a general application for every man, who is by definition King of the Earth and thereby the possessor of a throne that is his mandate from Heaven. Even in these later times, men are still conscious of being kings, inasmuch as they have powers of intelligence and of will that incomparably surpass those of other creatures. However, the majority are more or less in a state of vagueness and uncertainty about their throne, and more or less forgetful that although it—that is, the mandate—is always veiled from them or ''disguised,'' it is always one and the same. In other words, they are no longer kings except by virtuality; in actuality, they are usurpers, since veritable kingship implies an, as it were, organic connection between king and throne. For the perfect king the mandate, not his human subjectivity, is his true ego, one with the Divine Self. The failure to recognize the throne is thus a violation of the precept of Gnosis, ''Know thyself,'' whereas fulfillment

of this principle is "the knowledge" that Solomon had been given, and of which the condition is surrender (Islam) in its highest sense: that is, effacement of the human ego before the Supreme Subject.

The precise words with which Bilqis answers the question that is put to her are subtly significant in this respect, subtly because there is here a disguise, which is in a sense analogous to that of the throne. It is permissible to say, for example, that in such a sentence as "When asked the color of snow, the blind man said it was black," the word "white" is disguisedly present, because it is forced into the mind. So also, when the Queen is asked, "Is your throne like this?" and when she wrongly answers, "It is as if it were it," the right answer is forced into our minds: namely, "It is it." The Arabic words, *huwa huwa* literally mean, "He is he," for *'arsh,* "throne," is masculine. They also constitute the Arabic formula for expressing identity, and above all, liturgically, the Supreme Identity.[13]

As to Solomon's second test, which serves to demonstrate why Bilqis could not recognize her throne, the meaning remains much the same as in the allegorical interpretation. Here, however, what seems to be present but is in fact absent is the Truth as Object, whereas it is rather a question of Truth in the sense of Subjective Reality. In either case, we are reminded of the already-quoted verse that likens the works of disbelievers to "a mirage in the desert that the thirsty man supposes to be water." It will be understood from this and the other examples given of the symbolism of water why Solomon's strategy is so powerfully successful. When Bilqis lifts up her robes to avoid wetting them and steps onto the glass pavement of the court, the sudden contact of her foot with the opposite of what it had expected is directly sensed as the experience of error, which is enough in itself to produce a profound "alchemical" effect upon the soul. But this effect is aggravated beyond all measures by her consciousness that the error is, precisely, about water. Thus, her whole outlook, already shaken by her first mistake, is transformed in a moment from heresy to orthodoxy by the shock of discovering the "water" to be absent, where she had believed it to be present. In her saying, "I surrender with Solomon," these last two words are an indication that her surrender is to be understood in the same highest sense as his surrender—namely, the effacement of the self before the Self, which is the condition of his Gnosis.

NOTES

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1. Far from being a "concrete" image arbitrarily chosen by man to illustrate some "abstract" idea, a symbol is the manifestation, in some lower mode, of the higher

reality that it symbolizes and that stands in as close relationship to it as the root of a tree to a leaf. Thus, water is Mercy, and it would be true to say this even without any understanding of symbolism and even without belief in the Transcendent. Immersion in water has an inevitable effect on the soul in addition to its purification of the body. In the absence of ritual intention, this effect may be altogether momentary and superficial; it is nonetheless visible in the fact of almost any bather emerging from a lake or river or sea, however, quickly it may be effaced by the resumption of ''ordinary life.''

2. *Gnosis* is the direct and immediate knowledge of God. This word, which is derived from the Greek verb ''to know,'' is commonly used as the English equivalent of the Arabic *ma'rifa,* which literally means ''knowledge.'' Sufis use *ma'rifa* to refer to the kind of knowledge that transcends formal, ''book'' learning or knowledge in general, which in Arabic is *'ilm.* (Ed.)

3. In Genesis, too, the pure primordial substance of the created universe is water: ''The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.'' The same is true of the duality, which also appears in Genesis: ''[God] divided the waters'' (Gen. 1:7–8).

4. ''And you see the earth as barren and when we send down upon it water it thrills and sprouts. That is because...the Hour is coming beyond all doubt and because God raises those who are in the tombs'' (Qur'an 22:5).

5. To speak of death as ''a giving up of the ghost'' is thus altogether correct, and it is because life is a presence of Spirit, and therefore altogether transcendent, that it defines any scientific analysis.

6. The great symbol of life is also very precarious over much of the earth's face, especially in those regions where the Qur'anic Revelation was first received.

7. Ice and waves are parallel as symbols, representing, respectively, the rigidity (or brittleness) and instability of this form-bound world.

8. The Arabic letter *mim* stands for death (*mawt*) and has the numerical value of 40. However, this letter and this number also have the sense of reconciliation and return to the principle. It is said that Seth was able to return to the Earthly Paradise and that he remained there for 40 years. See Rene Guenon, *The Lord of the World* (Ellingstring, Yorkshire, 1983), chap. 5.

9. The *Afrad* are the few exceptional individuals who are independent of any particular religion but who represent religion in its highest aspect, being, without any effort on their part but by their very nature, as it were, throwbacks to the primordial state of man, which it is the purpose of religion to regain.

10. The Qur'an here as it were traces from Moses only the symbolism of the lower waters, passing over his more exalted aspects, which are themes of other passages.

11. See Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 134, 1n.

12. This is an altogether universal principle of the highest practical significance. In Hinduism, for example, either Shiva or Vishnu may be invoked as Absolute, although their hierarchic station is at the level of the higher of the two seas.

13. On this point, see Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century,* 114, 2n.

13

Islamic Literatures: Writing in the Shade of the Qur'an

Shawkat M. Toorawa

The adjective ''Islamic'' has come both to denote practices related to the religion of Islam—such as Islamic law, Islamic dress, and the Islamic calendar—and to connote broader cultural phenomena arising from the civilization of Islam—such as Islamic architecture, Islamic medicine, and Islamic Spain. In the rubric ''Islamic literatures,'' although the latter broader usage seems to be implied, the former narrower one is usually meant. Indeed, the term ''Islamic literatures'' in the wider sense is little used, although it is to be found in the title of James Kritzeck's *Anthology of Islamic Literature*[1] and in an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* by Anne-Marie Schimmel, a noted scholar of Iranian and Indian Islam, who observes that the term ''Islamic literatures'' ''virtually defies any comprehensive definition.''[2] In 1986, the Pakistani English-language poet and critic Alamgir Hashmi circumvented the vexed question of the use of the adjective ''Islamic'' by calling his anthology of ''modern and contemporary literature of the Islamic lands'' *The Worlds of Muslim Imagination*.[3] His stated concern was with ''the Muslim imagination, its literary engagements and manifestations, but not with Islamic pieties.''[4]

''Islamic literature,'' then, is best understood as the *total* literary output of Muslims and those influenced by Islamic civilization. Accordingly, it comprises works in Arabic, Chinese, Hausa, Indonesian, Persian, Swahili, Turkish, Urdu, and dozens of other languages, including English. This output encompasses everything from the Qur'an,[5] an Arabic scripture that emerged with Islam in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century CE, to the Hebrew poetry of the Iberian Judah Halevi (d. 1145 CE),[6] to the fifteenth century Sundiata (Son-Jara) Epic of Mali,[7] to *Noor,* an English-language novel by the U.S.-based Pakistani writer Sorayya Khan.[8] Limitations of space do not permit such a comprehensive survey here. Instead, using the Qur'an as something of an axis, this chapter highlights a sampling of genres, writers,

and works, with less of an emphasis on poetry as this has typically received greater attention in surveys, scholarship, and translation.[9]

In 978 CE, the Baghdad bookseller Ibn al-Nadim published *al-Fihrist* (The Catalogue), a comprehensive and annotated list of every book that he was aware of that had *ever* been written in Arabic or translated into Arabic.[10] This work has provided posterity with invaluable information about works that no longer survive (estimated at a staggering and depressing 98 percent of all works written in Islamic languages) and about the ways in which Muslims of the tenth century CE—during the so-called Golden Age of Arabo-Islamic culture—viewed their literatures. Ibn al-Nadim divides the literatures of his time into 10 categories, as follows:

1. Languages and scripts; scriptures of Muslims and other "Peoples of the Book"
2. Grammar and lexicography
3. History, belles-lettres, biography, genealogy
4. Poetry
5. Scholastic theology
6. Law and Hadith
7. Philosophy and the "ancient sciences"
8. Stories, legends, romances; magic, conjuring
9. Doctrines of the non-monotheistic creeds
10. Alchemy

Not surprisingly, script, scripture, and grammar have pride of place, appearing at the beginning of the work and altogether accounting for one-fifth of the whole catalogue. Though the *Fihrist* includes books from other languages, it only mentions these if they were translated into Arabic from their original sources. Knowledge of Arabic then, as now, was a premium for Muslims. Today, in the early twenty-first century CE, only 20 percent of the Muslim world speaks Arabic natively and an even smaller percentage is fully literate in the language. However, Arabic is just as necessary today as it was in Ibn al-Nadim's day for anyone interested in the study of Islamic civilization.[11] Knowledge of Arabic gives one access to the Qur'an in its original language, as well as to a vast output of religious and nonreligious scholarship. The *Fihrist* was itself the product of nonreligious scholarship, written by a man who was a courtier (or the son of a courtier) and a bookman. Such scholarship was possible because of the explosion of translation and writing since the ninth century CE. This birth of multiple literary forms was to a large extent due to the availability of paper,[12] a Chinese import, which in turn resulted in the various kinds of "Islamic literatures" that Ibn al-Nadim recorded.

By definition, the first example of Islamic literature is the Qur'an, a series of revelations in Arabic believed by Muslims to have emanated from God,

and orally transmitted by the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad from the year 610 CE until Muhammad's death in 632 CE. These revelations, which were in Arabic, Muhammad's native language, were memorized and written down piecemeal by his followers, and were subsequently collected and collated into a written codex (*mushaf*). This canonizing of the "text" into what was effectively the very first Islamic book is traditionally believed to have taken place in the 650s.[13]

The Qur'an is organized into *Sura*s ("chapters"), more or less from the longest to the shortest—with the notable exception of the opening chapter, which is only seven *ayat* ("verses") long. *Sura*s are read or recited from memory in whole or in part; many pious Muslims memorize the whole Qur'an. Through its admonitory narratives of past revelations and its exemplary stories, the Qur'an also functions as a blueprint for a good and righteous life.[14] In addition to its liturgical and didactic functions, the Qur'an is also a source of law: roughly 600 of its approximately 6,200 verses are legislative. One major work on the probative nature of these legal verses was the *Risala* (Treatise) of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820 CE).[15]

The influence of the Qur'an on the scholarship, artistic output, and philosophy of the Islamic world, both Arab and non-Arab, is immeasurable. Its appearance accounts for the development of the Arabic script, a writing system that came to be used by almost all Muslim people. For example, Modern Persian (Farsi)—an Indo-European language—is written in Arabic script, as are the Central Asian languages Uighur and Pushtu, the South Asian language Urdu, and the African language Hausa. In the past, Arabic script was used to write Ottoman Turkish and Malay, whose Arabic script was called *Jawi* (Ar. "Javanese"). Arabic script also formed the basis for one of Islamic art and architecture's most recognizable features, Arabic calligraphy. Some modern artists today use Arabic calligraphy and other media to interpret Islamic literatures. The Algerian artist Rachid Koreïchi, for instance, has installations devoted to the Arabic works of the Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) and the Persian works of the Sufi Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273 CE). Ibn 'Arabi's works of metaphysical Sufism are widely read, such as his *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom).[16] Rumi is the author of the influential *Divan-e Shams-e Tabriz* (The Complete Works of "Shams of Tabriz"), a 40,000 verse collection comprising quatrains (*ruba'iyyat*) and love poems (*ghazal*s), and the *Masnavi Ma'navi* (Spiritual Couplets), a poetic work of more than 25,000 couplets that is often called the most important work of Islamic literature after the Qur'an. Some mystics have even called Rumi's *Masnavi* the "Persian Qur'an," for its simplicity and profundity.[17]

Most Muslim scholars argue that by virtue of being God's word, the Qur'an is the pinnacle of literary perfection. Some concede that it is poetic in form, but they have almost unanimously rejected the idea that it is poetry. Indeed, the Qur'an itself points out that the Prophet Muhammad was not a poet (Qur'an 36:29). This is a polemical statement, however, made in the

context of attacks on Muhammad by detractors for being a soothsayer inspired by supernatural forces, or a poet inspired by a supernatural muse. To Muhammad are attributed negative statements about Imru'l-Qays (d. ca. 540 CE), the great sixth-century Arab poet (who is still considered, incidentally, the greatest of all Arab poets), and whose poem "Stop, you two, and let us weep" is one of the seven Pre-Islamic classics, the *Mu'allaqat,* or so-called Suspended Odes.[18] Imru'l-Qays was a *bon vivant* whose lifestyle was certainly not in keeping with the Prophet Muhammad's moderate views. However, Muhammad himself had panegyrists of whom he approved, such as Hassan ibn Thabit (d. ca. 660 CE) and Ka'b ibn Zuhayr (fl. seventh century CE), whose "Su'ad has left" poem Muhammad so cherished that he gave Ka'b his mantle. For this reason, the poem came to be known as *Qasidat al-Burda,* "The Mantle Ode." In the thirteenth century, the Egyptian poet Busiri (d. ca. 1294 CE) wrote an expanded commentary in verse on Ka'b's poem. Though arguably of less literary value than the original, the circumstances of its writing—the paralyzed Busiri composed it after dreaming that the Prophet cured him when he placed his mantle upon him—have made it one of the most popular pieces of literature across the Islamic world. There are commentaries, super-commentaries, and imitations of this work in dozens of languages, and it is even used as a protective amulet.[19]

Debates about the nature of the Qur'an occasioned numerous works of theology and philosophy, some in the context of the infamous ninth-century "inquisition" by the Caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 833 CE), a leader remembered not only for his partiality for rationalist Greek philosophy but also for the translation of non-Arabic writings into Arabic, an activity he enthusiastically patronized.[20] Much Greek material, from Galen's medical treatises to Aristotle's philosophical ones, was rendered into Arabic by Christian translators, such as the Nestorian physician Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. ca. 873 CE).[21] Middle Persian advice literature and wisdom literature were translated by Muslim Persian writers; many of them were state secretaries in the Caliphal administration.[22] Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 759 CE), for example, translated the Pahlavi work *Khwaday-Namag* (Book of Kings).[23] A verse rendering of this history, the *Shahnameh* (Epic of Kings), was made at the end of the tenth century CE by the poet Ferdowsi (d. 1020 CE) and is one of the masterpieces of Persian literature (eclipsing his other works, including his poem, "Yusuf and Zulaykha").[24] Ibn al-Muqaffa' also made famous the stories of *Kalila wa Dimna,* a collection of moral fables originally by the Indian writer Bidpai. Through such translations, Arabic literature, and later the literatures of Africa, Asia, and Europe, acquired many stories, some of which, like *Kalila wa Dimna,* emanated from the Sanskrit literary tradition.[25] Ibn al-Muqaffa' is also credited, perhaps apocryphally, with trying to imitate the Qur'an. Previously, one contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad had mocked the Prophet by saying that the stories he himself knew from the glorious Persian

past were superior to the ones Muhammad was bringing in the Qur'an. This taunt is said to have occasioned the revelation of *Surat Yusuf* (Qur'an 12, "Joseph"), the only Qur'anic chapter that is a discrete and continuous narrative, and the inspiration for numerous works describing the romance between Yusuf (Joseph) and Zulaykha, Potiphar's wife.[26] The only major rival to this romance in Islamic literature is the story of the star-crossed Arab lovers Layla and Majnun, which was popularized in works such as the Persian poet Nizami's (d. 1209 CE) *Leyli va Majnun*. This story was even the inspiration for Eric Clapton's rock song, "Layla."[27] Popular South Asian romances that fall under the "Islamic" rubric include the Urdu *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* (Romance of Prince Hamza), inspired by the exploits of Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet Muhammad's uncle and an early martyr of Islam, and the Panjabi *Heer Ranjha* by Waris Shah (d. 1766 CE).[28] In Panjabi too is the mystical love poetry of Sultan Bahu, which is still sung today in such devotional musical forms as *qawwali* and *kaafi*.[29]

The need to understand the language of the Qur'an, accompanied by the need to understand the intent of the Prophet Muhammad's statements and actions, occasioned wider and deeper study in fields that later came to be known as "the Islamic sciences." These consisted of lexicography (*lugha*); grammar (*nahw*) and morphology (*tasrif*); metrics (*'arud*), rhyme (*qawafi*), and prosody (*sun'at al-shi'r*); rhetoric (*bayan, balagha*); literary criticism (*naqd*); legal theory and methodology (*usul al-fiqh*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*); and philological commentary (*sharh, ma'ani, gharib*). This last genre, in a more expanded form, became the "science" of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir al-Qur'an*).[30] Scholars regard the monumental Arabic Qur'an commentary *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (The Sum of Clarity Concerning the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'an) by the Persian scholar Tabari (d. 923 CE) as pivotal because it combined all earlier exegetical traditions and became a major source for later commentaries.[31] Also widely consulted today are the Arabic commentaries of Zamakhshari (d. 1144 CE), Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE), and the handy *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Commentary of the two Jalals) by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 1459 CE) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505 CE).[32] The latter work acquired considerable importance in Southeast Asia where it was translated and expanded upon by the Achenese scholar 'Abd al-Ra'uf Singkili (d. 1693 CE) in his Malay-language *Tarjuman al-mustafid* (The Influential Interpreter).[33] Also significant is *the Mafatih al-ghayb* (Keys to the Unseen) of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210 CE), an important theologian often viewed as equal in importance to Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE). Ibn Sina's *Qanun fi al-tibb* (Canon of Medicine) was in wide use in the Islamic and Christian worlds for centuries, and in his *al-Shifa'* (The Cure), he systematically describes his philosophical views. Ghazali wrote a vigorous refutation of Islamic philosophy titled *Tahafut al-falasifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), directed at Ibn Sina. This was itself refuted in the

Tahafut al-tahafut (The Incoherence of ''The Incoherence'') by another major philosopher, Ibn Rushd (Averroës) (d. 1198 CE).[34]

Ghazali held the chair in Islamic law at the premier law school of the day, the Madrasa Nizamiyya, founded by Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092 CE), the vizier to the Seljuq Turkish rulers. Nizam al-Mulk was an author in his own right, notably of a Persian treatise on kingship, the *Siyasat Nameh* (Book of Government).[35] Like his patron, Ghazali wrote a work in the ''mirror for princes'' genre, the *Nasihat al-muluk* (Advice to Kings). Nizam al-Mulk, Ghazali, and the Ismaili missionary Hassan-i Sabbah (d. 1124 CE) are protagonists, together with the Persian mathematician-poet Omar Khayyam (d. 1131 CE)—whose quatrains have eclipsed his cubic equations—in the French novel *Samarcande* by Amin Maalouf, one of the few writers anywhere writing historical novels about authors of Islamic literature.[36] Ghazali's slim autobiographical treatise *al-Munqidh min al-dalal* (Deliverance from Error) is widely read, and his magisterial *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) has been instrumental in bridging the (apparent) rift between Islamic orthodoxy and Sufism.[37] Eight centuries later, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938 CE), an Indian poet and philosopher, published *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* based on a series of university lectures. He is also the author of the Hindustani national song, *Saare jahan se achcha* (The Finest in the World).

Important recent commentaries on the Qur'an include the Ottoman Ismail Hakkı Bursevi's (d. 1725 CE) *Ruh al-bayan* (The Soul of Eloquence), the Moroccan Sufi Ibn 'Ajiba's (d. 1809 CE) *al-Bahr al-Madid* (The Expansive Sea), Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's (d. 1898 CE) Urdu *Kanz-ul-iman* (The Treasure of Faith)—he is also the first Muslim to write a commentary (partial) on the Bible, Fadhlalla Haeri's English series *Keys to the Qur'an*[38] and Amin Ahsan Islahi's (d. 1997) Urdu *Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (The Organization of the Qur'an), which advances a theory of the Qur'an's structure and morphology in its canonical form based on the work of Farahi (d. 1930).[39] Although no full-length commentary on the Qur'an by a woman has yet appeared, three U.S.-based female scholars have recently given the Qur'an systematic attention: the African American convert Amina Wadud, the Pakistani-American Asma Barlas, and the Syrian Nimat Barazangi.[40] The Egyptian scholar 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman (d. 1974 CE) published the first partial commentary on the Qur'an by a woman, under her pen name Bint al-Shati' (''Daughter of the Seashore''). Bint al-Shati' also edited the *Risalat al-ghufran* (Epistle on Pardon) by the marvelous medieval Arab poet Ma'arri (d. 1057 CE).[41] The *Risalat al-ghufran* recounts the encounter of its protagonist (the work's addressee) with people in Paradise and Hell, into which Ma'arri casts the allegedly heretical poet Bashshar ibn Burd (d. 784 CE), among others. This is ironic, as Ma'arri was also accused of heresy and was, like Bashshar, blind. Ma'arri's *al-Fusul wa al-ghayat* (Paragraphs and Periods), because it is in rhymed prose, has been seen by some as a

blasphemous imitation of the Qur'an, but the charge is no doubt an attempt to disparage this gifted author.

Commentaries on the Qur'an inspired commentaries and super-commentaries in other fields too, such as poetry and grammar. The first major Arabic book after the Qur'an was *al-Kitab* (The Book) of Sibawayhi (d. ca. 795 CE), a systematic study of Arabic grammar.[42] Countless grammar books followed, culminating in such works as the versified Arabic grammar *al-Alfiyya* (The Thousand-liner) by the Andalusian Ibn Malik (d. 1274 CE); *al-Ajurumiyya,* the Moroccan Berber Ibn Ajurum's (d. 1323 CE) eponymous condensation of all the rules of Arabic grammar; and *Bahth al-matalib* (Discussion of Grammatical Questions) by the Archbishop of Aleppo, Jermanus Farhat (d. 1732 CE). By virtue of the fact that Arabic was the language of scholarship for much of the Muslim world well into the sixteenth century CE, non-Arabic works before that time were, relatively speaking, less common—but this is not to say that they were less important. Indeed, the interplay of Arabic and Persian in particular is of great significance. Persian may have adopted rhyme patterns, for instance, from Arabic, but it gave to Arabic such forms as lyric poetry and the quatrain. Persian was also used in Muslim India, where it remained the language of culture and administration until 1835. The poet-scholar Azad Bilgrami's (d. 1786 CE) poetry—his panegyric earned him the title Hassan-i Hind (The Hassan [ibn Thabit] of India), likening him to the Prophet Muhammad's panegyrist—and his magnum opus *Subhat al-Marjan* (The Coral Rosary), a major historical–biographical–literary critical work, were in Arabic, but he wrote many more works in Persian.[43]

The Qur'an, as God's word, is held by Muslims as the standard of eloquence. It comes as no surprise therefore that it has been frequently drawn upon, thematically, textually, and structurally.[44] Textual recourse to the Qur'an involves quoting, creatively misquoting, or reworking Qur'anic passages. As might be expected, it is widely quoted by characters in novels and stories. One of the most unusual quotations is in the autobiography of 'Umar ibn Sa'id (d. 1864 CE), a West African slave and former minor Islamic scholar from North Carolina who was urged by abolitionists to write an account of his life. He begins this work, which he wrote in Arabic, with the entire text of *Surat al-Mulk* (Qur'an 67, The Dominion).[45] The modern Syro-Lebanese poet Adonis, who was born in a Shiite Muslim family, also uses Qur'anic passages, often recasting the Qur'an's words and thereby earning the disapproval of pious critics. His most recent work, like the Qur'an resonantly called *al-Kitab* (The Book), has also irked critics.[46]

Thematic recourse to the Qur'an has taken many forms. The most well known are modern uses of Qur'anic themes, such as the Algerian novelist Tahir Wattar's use of the theme of apocalyptic convulsions on Judgment Day in *al-Zilzal* (The Earthquake).[47] This novel is especially interesting for the fact that the protagonist mentions Nobel Prize–winning author Naguib

Mahfouz's *Awlad haratina* (Children of the Alley), one of the few fiction works structurally to draw upon the Qur'an.[48] *Children of the Alley* is divided into five parts, each corresponding to a character evidently based on Qur'anic and Biblical figures, but is also subdivided into 114 chapters, as is the Qur'an. The novel has been misread (and accordingly banned) as an allegorical comment on religion and the death of God. It is, rather, the converse: a reading of modern Egyptian society through the scriptural archetypes. Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim's (d. 1987 CE) *Ahl al-kahf* (People of the Cave) is about the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus mentioned in *Surat al-Kahf* (18, The Cave) of the Qur'an.[49] Indonesian-born ʻAli Ahmad Ba-Kathir's (d. 1969) *Harut wa Marut* is about two faultfinding angels; Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses,* like his subsequent *Haroun and the Sea of Stories,* is a thinly veiled critique of contemporary authoritarian Islam (in Britain in the former, in Iran in the latter) through a parody of the Prophet Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel.[50] Whether Rushdie qualifies as a writer of "Islamic Literature" will depend on the pietistic commitments of the person making the decision. Certainly, he merited inclusion in Amin Malak's recent analytical survey, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English.*[51] Other authors in this work illustrate the wide sweep implicit in the notion of postcolonial Islamic literature(s). A partial list includes the Pakistani Ahmed Ali (d. 1994), who was also the translator of a widely available, if only passably good, translation of the Qur'an into English; the Somali Nuruddin Farah; the Tanzanian from Zanzibar Abdulrazak Gurnah; the Tanzanian-Canadian Ismaili writer M.G. Vassanji;[52] and the female authors, the Nigerian Zaynab Alkali and the Malaysian Che Husna Azhari.[53]

The colonial-era encounter of Islamic literatures with the West in the nineteenth century and after, principally (but by no means exclusively) through English, French, and Russian, resulted in the "importation" of the novel and the short story into the Islamic world. The novel in particular started out as a vehicle for nationalist, and sometimes secularist expression, but grew to become a major genre in Islamic literatures. Many novelists chose to write in the colonial language, as the Hashmi anthology and the Malak volume mentioned above record for English. However, prose output thrived in "Islamic" languages too. Suffice to mention here—a survey of this material is certainly a desideratum—some key figures. In Arabic, Mahfouz has been one of the most prolific and admired writers; the 1989 Nobel Prize in Literature merely confirmed his status as the dean of Arabic letters.[54] However, he has not eclipsed other great writers in Arabic, such as the Sudanese Tayeb Salih, whose 1969 *Mawsim al-hijra ila al-shamal* (Season of Migration to the North) is widely viewed as The Great Arabic Novel and is to be found on every list of postcolonial writing. A riposte to the simultaneously seductive and insidious nature of the colonial venture, it is *inter alia* a sophisticated rereading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and a supple inversion of Shakespeare's *Othello.*[55] It was anticipated in 1961 by the Senegalese writer

Cheikh Hamidou Kane's French novel *L'aventure ambiguë* (The Ambiguous Adventure), which was also about the travel of a protagonist to Europe and the clash of African and Islamic cultures with European culture.[56]

The Saudi-Iraqi Abdel Rahman Munif (d. 2004) wrote poignantly in *Mudun al-milh* (Cities of Salt) about the changes wrought by modernity in an unnamed oil nation and about the excesses of politicians and businessmen.[57] The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk has also spoken out against the status quo. His 2002 *Kar* (Snow), named one of the 10 best books of 2004 by the *New York Times,* is about the relationship between Westernism and Islamism, both typically espoused with fervor in Turkey. Pamuk came to fame with *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (My Name is Red), which is a murder mystery of sorts set in sixteenth-century Ottoman Istanbul.[58] Iran's most famous prose writer is Sadegh Hedayat (d. 1951). His 1937 morbid and unsettling novella *Buf-e kur* (The Blind Owl) is his masterpiece. Like *L'Etranger* (The Stranger) by Albert Camus—who was, incidentally, a *pied noir,* that is, a Frenchman born in Muslim North Africa, where most of his novels are set—the appearance of *Buf-e kur* forever changed the Iranian and international literary landscapes.[59] Modern Urdu letters boast of a number of important prose writers. Predictably, the partition of India and Pakistan features prominently, allegorically, or explicitly in their writings. Suffice to mention here the female novelist Qurratulain Hyder, whose magnum opus, *Aag Ka Darya* (River of Fire), is a historical sweep that begins before the Common Era. Like Hyder, Ismet Chugtai (d. 1991) was born in Aligarh, India, and was another major female figure in Urdu letters, but writing in India not Pakistan.[60]

As we have seen, many Muslim writers have turned to the Qur'an for inspiration. The Yemeni novelist Zayd Muti' Dammaj (d. 2001) was inspired by the Qur'anic account of Yusuf and Zulaykha (Potiphar's wife) in his novel *al-Rahina* (The Hostage). This novel is about a young man who becomes the object of affection of the sister of the governor in whose palace he is being kept prisoner.[61] The Moroccan novelist Driss Chraïbi takes on the Prophet Muhammad himself and his deeply amorous relationship with his wife Khadija in the daring but reverential *L'homme du livre* (The Man of the Book), a French novel(la) that is principally a first-person account of the thoughts of a fictionalized Muhammad on the eve of the first revelation.[62] Chraïbi includes the mysterious Qur'anic figure of al-Khidr in the novel, combining him with the Syrian monk Bahira, who was said to have seen the mark of prophecy on the young Muhammad. In the title story of his collection *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields,* the U.K.-based Bangladeshi writer Syed Manzurul Islam melds this same al-Khidr into his main character, the itinerant Brother-O Man.[63]

One antecedent for accounts about an errant or wandering character, often a rogue, who dupes those around him is the *maqamat* ("Assemblies," or "Standings"), a unique literary form in a very ornate, stylized manner, which

alternates rhyming prose with poetry. Originated in Arabic by Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (d. 1008 CE), and expertly taken up by Hariri (d. 1122 CE),[64] it subsequently inspired the Hebrew *Maqamat* of al-Harizi (d. thirteenth century CE) in Andalusia and also the anonymous Spanish picaresque novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1531).[65] *Maqamat* is usually named for a character, a locale, or the item around which the trickery revolves. Mixing prose and poetry (*prosimetrum*) in this genre is not uncommon. It is to be found in scholarly, belletristic, and even popular works such as the medieval *Alf layla wa layla* (The Thousand and One Nights). This is one of the most enduring and recognizable story collections in world literature although it has been criticized in Arabic literature because of its fabulous and salacious content.[66] Other important story cycles in Islamic literature include the fifteenth-century Malay *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Tale of Hang Tuah), about the exploits of the eponymous hero and four friends in fifteenth-century Malacca; the sixteenth-century Turkish *Book of Dede Korkut;* a 12-story collection of epic and heroic tales of the Turkic Oghuz people; and the medieval "Darangen Epic" of the Maranao of the southern Philippines, which is a historical record of events from before the period of Islamization.[67]

The Algerian novelist Assïa Djebar turns to historical chronicles in *Loin de Médine* (Far from Medina), an attempt to flesh out the lives of the women around the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims. She rereads the historical accounts preserved in such works as Tabari's monumental *Tarikh al-rusul wa al-muluk* (History of Messengers and Kings), a world history from creation to the mid-tenth century CE.[68] One of the many sources used by Tabari was *Kitab Baghdad* (Book of Baghdad) by Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur (d. 893 CE). Only one volume of this work survives, but Jorge Luis Borges (d. 1986), one of the many world authors drawing inspiration from Islamic literatures, mentions it in his short story, "El Tintorero Enmascarado Hakim de Merv" (The Masked Dyer Hakim of Merv).[69]

Djebar's and others' attempts to make sense fictionally of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds mirror early Muslims' attempts to do so. The corpus of writing that they had available was the Hadith, and they immediately set themselves the task of verifying whether the words they had recorded were authentically transmitted. Thus, the groundwork of the early Hadith collectors, such as Bukhari (d. 870 CE) and Darimi (d. 869 CE), and the Hadith transmitters, such as Nawawi (d. 1277 CE)—who produced a very short précis of the most salient Hadith narratives in *al-Arba'in al-Nawawiya* (The Nawawi Forty [Hadith])—was accompanied by a vigorous scrutiny of the transmitters themselves.[70] This investigation into the personalities and characters of the men and women involved in the transmission of Prophetic tradition became the basis for a wider activity, namely the writing and compiling of large biographical works, such as Ibn Sa'd's (d. 845 CE) early compendium, *al-Tabaqat al-kubra* (The Great Generations). These biographical works were repositories of information about birth, birthplace,

education, output, reliability, and death. Some biographical works came to be devoted to a specific region; for example, Indian scholars were the subjects of 'Abd al-Hayy's (d. 1923) *Nuzhat al-khawatir* (The Promenade of Ideas). Others were devoted to a specific century, such as the Egyptian Sakhawi's (d. 1497) *al-Daw' al-lami'* (The Gleaming Lamp), which was devoted to the ninth Islamic century (fifteenth century CE). Still others were devoted to a specific profession, such as the manumitted slave Yaqut's (d. 1229 CE) *Mu'jam al-udaba'* (Encyclopaedia of Writers). Sometimes, the subjects of these books were both people and their works, as in the compilation of the top songs of Baghdad by the courtier Abu al-Faraj (d. 967 CE) in his massive *Kitab al-Aghani* (Book of Songs). Yaqut produced the alphabetically arranged *Mu'jam al-buldan* (Encyclopedia of Place-Names), which was devoted to places and locales, building on earlier geographies such as the anonymous Persian *Hudud al-'Alam* (Limits of the World).[71] Such compilations remain the principal source of information about much of medieval Islamic culture and society.[72]

Biographical compilations were complemented by book-length biographies. Ibn Hisham's (d. 833 CE) abridged edition of Ibn Ishaq's (d. 767 CE) *Sirat Rasul Allah* (The Life of the Messenger of God) is an early and widely quoted biography of the Prophet Muhammad.[73] It would become a model for later biographies, a genre out of which arose some autobiographies. Indeed, scholars frequently felt the need to write about their careers and accomplishments: to set the record straight, to serve as a model for their children and students, or, as many explicitly state, to follow the Qur'anic injunction (Qur'an 93:11) to broadcast the virtues bestowed upon them by God. The autobiography is a significant genre of Islamic literature.[74] Several authors already mentioned wrote autobiographies, such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq, al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Suyuti, and Azad Bilgrami. One famous autobiographer was the so-called father of sociology, 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 CE), whose six-volume world history is eclipsed by its sophisticated one-volume introduction, *al-Muqaddima* (The Prolegomenon).[75] From the fragments of the autobiography of the scholar-physician 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (d. 1231 CE), we learn a great deal about the political climate of the time and also get a glimpse of the fundamental role played by patronage in supporting literary output.[76] It is patronage that Sayyide Salme, an Omani princess who fled her home in Zanzibar, sought when she wrote under her adopted name Emilie Ruete, *Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin* (Memoirs of an Arabian Princess). The memoir is also a literary form with a distinguished pedigree.[77] One of the most famous of such works in all of Islamic literature is the Chaghatai *Babur-Nameh* (Book of Babur). This work contains the memoirs of Babur (d. 1530 CE), the Central Asian founder of the Mughal dynasty in India.[78] The diary is a less attested form, although the deeply personal *Kashf al-asrar* (The Unveiling of Secrets) by the Persian Sufi Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1210 CE) certainly reads that way.[79]

Sufism (*tasawwuf*) accounts for a considerable literary output and, as the current interest in the poetry of Rumi suggests, is very popular. Indeed, Sufism's "popular" appeal often put it at odds with the orthodoxy espoused by the formal religious scholars (*ulama*). This explains the significance of Ghazali's espousal of Sufism, and of its incorporation into the *Han Kitab* (Chinese Writings), an early modern corpus of texts by Muslim Chinese scholars.[80] Sufi scholars wrote expositions of Sufism, such as the Persian *Kashf al-mahjub* (Unveiling the Veiled) of Hujviri (d. 1071 CE), or the *Risala* (Epistle) of Qushayri (d. 1074 CE), and biographical works (hagiographies), such as the *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (Memorial of the Saints) by Farid al-Din 'Attar (d. 1220 CE).[81] They also wrote guides for their disciples and followers, such as the Malayo-Arabic *[al-] Sirat al-Mustaqim* (The Straight path) by the Gujarati al-Raniri (d. 1658 CE), the *Risalat al-Mu'awana* (The Book of Assistance) of the South Arabian 'Abdallah ibn 'Alawi (d. ca. 1719 CE), and Sheikh Muzaffer Ozak's (d. 1985 CE) *Ziynet-ül-kulub* (Adornment of Hearts).[82] Sufis have also written a great deal of poetry, such as the simple but searing verse attributed to the early woman mystic Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801 CE).[83]

Poetry, the preeminent literary form of Arabic literature, may be regarded, as the literary form *par excellence* of Islamic literatures too—for the premodern period at any rate. The *qasida,* or ode, arose in the same language and region as did the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an (the Arabian Peninsula), but it did so before Islam. It went on, in one guise or another, to find a place in every Islamic literature. Classical Arabic scholar Stefan Sperl recognized this when he read a poem his wife was then studying, by the Pakistani poet Faiz.[84] That realization led to an anthology titled *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance.* Most of the 50 poems and poets represented in this work are worth listing here, as they provide an apposite, if cursory, overview of what we might tentatively term the poetry of Islamic civilization:[85]

Arabic: Abu Tammam (d. 845 CE), in praise of an Abbasid caliph

Arabic: Mutanabbi (d. 965 CE), invective against Kafur

Hebrew: Solomon Ibn Gabirol (d. ca. 1058 CE), in praise of an unnamed person

Persian: Nasir-i Khusrau (d. ca. 1077 CE), in praise of knowledge and justice

Hebrew: Judah Halevi (d. 1141 CE), in praise of Isaac ibn al-Yatom

Persian: Khaqani (d. 1199 CE), Elegy on Mada'in

Arabic: Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235 CE), On Sufi love

Arabic: Rundi (d. 1285 CE), Elegy on the lost cities of al-Andalus

Arabic: Busiri (d. ca. 1296 CE), the *Burda* in praise of the Prophet Muhammad

Turkish: Necati (d. 1509 CE), "Rose Kaside" in praise of Sultan Bayezid II

Persian: Hayali (d. 1557 CE), "Rose Kaside" in praise of Sultan Suleyman

Persian: 'Urfi (d. 1591 CE), in praise of Abu al-Fath

Malay: Hamza Fansuri (c. 1600 CE), on Sufi teachings

Kurdish: Malaye Jaziri (d. 1640 CE), on Sufi teachings

Pashto: 'Abd al-Rahman Baba (d. c. 1710 CE), a pious *carpe diem*

Swahili: Anonymous (before 1800), in praise of a virtuous wife

Hausa: Usman dan Fodio (d. 1817 CE), in praise of the Prophet Muhammad

Urdu: Zauq (d. 1854 CE), in praise of Bahadur Shah II

Sindhi: Ghulam Haidar (d. 1861 CE), *Munajat* in praise of the Prophet Muhammad

Fulfulde: Asma'u Fodio (d. 1865 CE), in praise of Muhammad Bello

Malay: Anonymous (c. 1900), in praise of the Sufi text *Hidayatus salikin* (Guidance of the Seekers)

Urdu: Muhsin Kakoravi (d. 1905), in praise of the Prophet Muhammad

Panjabi: 'Abd al-Sattar (d. 1913), in praise of the Prophet Muhammad

Urdu: Altaf Husain Hali (d. 1914), on the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria

Persian: Iraj Mirza (d. 1926), criticizing the veil

Persian: Abu al-Qasim Lahuti (d. 1957), to the daughters of Iran

Arabic: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (d. 1964), rain song

Arabic: Badawi al-Jabal (d. 1981), love and God

Arabic: Wazir Junaid al-Bukhari, elegy for Abu Bakr Bube

Turkey: Attila Ilhan, "Hell Kaside"

Persian: Khu'i, "The Imam of the Plague"

Indonesian: [sung by Arfitta Ria]: The propagation of Islam in Indonesia by the *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints)[86]

Naturally, many other important poets deserve mention in a survey of Islamic literatures. Suffice here to evoke the names of the Sufi poet 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492 CE) and the feminist Forough Farrokhzad (d. 1967) in Persian.[87] Among the *ghazal* poets, one may cite Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810 CE) and Ghalib (d. 1869 CE) in Urdu.[88] In Turkish poetry, mention should be made of the Ottoman Baki (d. 1600 CE), the modern Hikmet (d. 1963), and the Islamist Kisakürek (d. 1983).[89] In Swahili, one should not overlook the religious poet Seyyid Abdallah bin Nasir (d. 1820 CE) and the "secular" poet Abdillatif Abdalla.[90] Finally, writing in English were the iconoclastic Kahlil Gibran (d. 1931) and the diasporic Agha Shahid Ali (d. 2001).[91]

"Islamic literatures," whether understood broadly (the literary output of Muslims and non-Muslims influenced by Islamic civilization) or narrowly (the literary output of Muslims inspired directly by Islam), comprise a fourteen-century legacy of scripture, epic, prose, poetry, romance, and drama of a richness that is still largely untold. Together, they continue to affect and inspire the lives of well over a billion people throughout the world.

NOTES

1. See James Kritzeck, ed., *Anthology of Islamic literature: From the Rise of Islam to Modern Times* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964) and Kritzeck, ed., *Modern Islamic Literature from 1800 to the Present* (New York: New American Library, 1970).

2. Annemarie Schimmel "Arts, Islamic," *Encyclopædia Britannica* from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. <http://wwwa.britannica.com/eb/article-13869> (Accessed March 1, 2006).

3. Alamgir Hashmi, ed., *The Worlds of Muslim Imagination* (Islamabad: Gulmohar, 1986), 3.

4. Ibid., 4. It should be noted that one literary movement does bear the name *al-adab al-Islami* (literally, "Islamic literature," in the singular), namely, literature produced in the context of the conservative Islamic religious revival in the Arab world. However, this "Islamic" literature, albeit prolific, has merited neither an entry in the comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* nor in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World,* although several paragraphs are devoted to it in the *OEMIW* entry, "Arabic Literature." Among *al-adab al-Islami*'s most famous authors are the Egyptian Najib al-Kilani (d. 1995), who defined the movement in his treatise "Islamism and Literary Movements," and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), whose 30-volume exegetical *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (*In the Shade of the Qur'an*) remains one of the most popular and widely available works in the Islamic world. See *In the Shade of the Qur'an, Vol. 30,* trans. M.A. Salahi and A.A. Shamis (London, U.K.: MWH, 1979).

5. There are approximately 60 published translations of the Qur'an into English. For a bibliography up to 1996, see A.R. Kidwai, *A Guide to English Translations of the Quran* (Port Louis: Hassam Toorawa Trust, 1997). Translations that have appeared since 1996 include: *The Quran: A New Interpretation; Textual Exegesis by Muhammad Baqir Behbudi,* translated by Colin Turner (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1997); *The Qur'an: A Modern English Version,* translated by Majid Fakhry (Reading, U.K.: Garnet Publishing, 1997); *An Interpretation of the Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings: A Bilingual Edition* (New York University Press, 2002); *The Quran, the First Poetic Translation,* by Fazlollah Nikayin (Skokie, Ill.: Ultimate Book, 2000); *The Qur'an, A New Translation from the Original,* by Mirza Abul Fazl [*sic*] (Hyderabad: Wakf Baitul Madina, 2002); *The Qur'an, A New Translation,* by Thomas Cleary (Chicago, Illinois: Starlatch Press, 2004); *The Qur'an, A New Translation,* by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

6. See Ross Brann, "Judah ha-Levi," in *The Literature of Al-Andalus,* ed. Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 265–281.

7. Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Sundiata, an Epic of Old Mali,* trans. G.D. Pickett (Harlow: Longman African Writers, 1994).

8. Sorayya Khan, *Noor* (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2003).

9. For a panoramic survey, see Schimmel , *Encyclopædia Britannica* . <http://wwwa.britannica.com/eb/article-13869>; and for a short guide to further reading, see below.

10. See *The Fihrist of al-Nadim,* 2 vols., trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

11. Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.

12. See Jonathan Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001); see also, Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad* (London and New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2005).

13. On the Qur'an as a book, see Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

14. Scholarship on the Qur'an is vast. For a brief overview, see Andrew Rippin, ''Koran,'' in *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature,* ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 2, 453–456; for in-depth information, see the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* 5 vols., ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001–2006).

15. See, for example, *Islamic Jurisprudence: al-Shafi'i's Risala,* trans. Majid Khadduri (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961).

16. Ibn [al-]'Arabi, *Bezels of Wisdom,* trans. R.W.J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

17. See *The Mathnawí of Jalalu'ddin Rumi,* ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, 8 vols. (London, U.K.: Luzac, 1925–1940). On Rumi, see Franklin Lewis, *Rumi Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford, U.K.: One World Publications, 2000). According to the 20 September 2002 issue of *Publisher's Weekly,* Rumi was the bestselling poet in the United States in 2002.

18. See *The Seven Odes,* trans. A.J. Arberry (London, U.K.: George Allen & Unwin, 1957).

19. For Ka'b's poem, see Michael Sells, *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); for Busiri's, see *The Burda of Imam Busiri,* trans. Hamza Yusuf, 3-CD set and Casebound Book (Hayward, California: Alhambra Productions, 2004).

20. See Michael Cooperson, *Al-Ma'mun* (Oxford, U.K.: One World Publications, 2005).

21. See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

22. See Mary Boyce, ''Middle Persian Literature,'' *Handbuch der Orientalistik, Volume 4,* ed. Ilya Gershevitch et al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 31–66.

23. See *History of Iranian Literature,* ed. Jan Rypka et al. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company), 1968.

24. Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: the Persian Book of Kings,* [selections] trans. Dick Davis (New York: Viking Press, 2006).

25. *Kalila and Dimna: Tales for Kings and Commoners: Selected Fables of Bidpai,* retold by Ramsay Wood (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1986).

26. See, for example, the play *Yusuf va-Zulaykha* (Teheran: Sukhan, 2002) by the noted Iranian director and writer Pari Saberi (b. 1932).

27. *Layla and Majnun by Nizami,* a Prose Adaptation by Colin Turner (London, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1997). See also Maria Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994).

28. *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastan of Amir Hamza,* trans. Frances W. Pritchett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

29. *Death before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu,* trans. Jamal Elias (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998).

30. On fields of study and curricula of the Islamic sciences, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

31. See *The Commentary on the Qur'an by Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari,* partially translated by J. Cooper (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1987).

32. For Ibn Kathir (and Tabari), see *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran,* trans. Muhammad Taqi-al-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000). The *Tafsir al-Jalalyn* (and numerous other major Qur'an commentaries) will be available in translation at <www.altafsir.com> in coming years.

33. See Peter Riddell, *Transferring a Tradition: 'Abd Al-Ra'ûf Al-Singkilî's Rendering into Malay of the Jalalâyn Commentary* (Berkeley, California: Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 1990).

34. See *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Philosophy,* ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Incidentally, Avicenna and Averroës are included by Dante in the *(Divine) Comedy.* Unlike the Prophet Muhammad, who resides in Hell, they are in Limbo, and are spared Hell.

35. Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings,* trans. Hubert Darke (Richmond, U. K.: Curzon Press, 2002).

36. Amin Maalouf, *Samarkand,* trans. Russell Harris (London: Quartet, 1992). Maalouf is a Paris-based, non-Muslim Lebanese writer.

37. Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error,* trans. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999); *The Revival of the Religious Sciences,* partial translation by Bankey Behari (Farnham: Sufi Publishing, 1972); *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings,* trans. R.R.C. Bagley (London, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1964).

38. Fadhlallah Haeri, *Keys to the Qur'an,* 5 vols., new edition (Reading, U. K.: Garnet Publishing, 1993).

39. See Rotraud Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an,* 2, 124–142. On Islahi, see Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1986).

40. Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002); Nimat Hafez Barazangi, *Woman's Identity and the Quran: A New Reading* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004).

41. *The Risalatu'l-Ghufran,* summarized and partially translated by Reynold A. Nicholson (London, U.K.: Royal Asiatic Society Journal, 1900).

42. For a systematic discussion of *al-Kitab,* see Michael Carter, *Sibawayhi* (London, U.K.: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

43. See Azad Bilgrami, "India as a Sacred Islamic Land," in *Religions of India in Practice,* trans. Carl Ernst, and ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 556–564.

44. See A.M. Zubaidi, "The impact of the Qur'an and Hadith on medieval Arabic literature," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period,* ed. A.F.L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 322–343; Stefan Wild, "The Koran as subtext in modern Arabic poetry," in *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry,* ed. Gert Borg and Ed de Moor (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 139–160; Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Modern Arabic Literature and the Qur'an: Creativity, Inimitability... Incompatibilities?" in *Religious Perspectives in Modern Muslim and Jewish Literatures,* ed. Glenda Abramson and Hilary Kilpatrick (London, U.K.: Routledge-Curzon, 2005), 239–257.

45. "The Life of Omar Ibn Said", trans. Ala A. Alryyes, in *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature,* trans. Ala A. Alryyes and ed. Marc Shell and Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 58–94.

46. Adonis' *al-Kitab* is not available in translation. For one of his works in English, see Adonis, *A Time between Ashes and Roses: Poems,* trans. Shawkat M. Toorawa (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

47. Tahir Wattar, *The Earthquake,* trans. William Granara (London, U.K.: Saqi Books, 2000).

48. Naguib Mahfouz, *Children of the Alley* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

49. Tawfiq al-Hakim, *The People of the Cave [Ahl al-Kahf],* trans. Mahmoud El Lozy (Cairo: Elias Modern Publishing House & Co., 1989).

50. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London, U.K.: Viking Press, 1988); *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London, U.K.: Granta Books in association with Penguin Books, 1991).

51. Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

52. Ahmed Ali, *Twilight in Delhi* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966). The following are the mentioned authors' most recent novels: Nuruddin Farah, *Links* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004); Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Desertion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005); M.G. Vassanji, *When She Was Queen* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2005).

53. Zaynab Alkali, *The Cobwebs and Other Stories* (Ikeja, Lagos State, Nigeria: Malthouse, 1997); Che Husna Azhari, *An Anthology of Kelantan Tales* (Selangor Darul Ehsan Malaysia: Furada Publishing House, 1992).

54. *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition,* ed. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993)

55. Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North,* trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London, U.K.: Heinemann, 1969). See also Jamal Mahjoub, *Wings of Dust* (Oxford, U.K.: Heinemann, 1994), which is itself a response, as it were, to Saleh's book.

56. Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure,* trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Walker, 1963).

57. Abdel Rahman Munif, *Cities of Salt,* trans. Peter Theroux (New York: Random House, 1987).

58. Orhan Pamuk, *Snow,* trans. Maureen Freely (London, U.K.: Faber and Faber, 2004); Pamuk, *My Name is Red,* trans. Erdag Göknar (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2001).

59. Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl,* trans. D.P. Costello (Repr., Edinburgh, U.K.: Rebel Inc., 1997); Albert Camus, *The Stranger,* trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

60. Qurratulain Hyder, *River of Fire,* "transcreated" into English by the author (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998). See also *Domains of Fear and Desire: Urdu Stories,* ed. Muhammad Umar Memon (Toronto: TSAR, 1992).

61. Zayd Muti' Dammaj, *The Hostage, A Novel,* trans. May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley (New York: Interlink, 1994).

62. Driss Chraïbi, *Muhammad, A Novel,* trans. Nadia Benabid (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

63. Syed Manzurul Islam, *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields* (Leeds, U.K.: Peepal Tree, 1997).

64. *The Assemblies of Al Hariri,* trans. Thomas Chenery (Repr., Farnborough: Gregg, 1969); *The Maqamat of Badi al-Zaman al-Hamadhani,* trans. W.J. Prendergast (Repr.,: London, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1973).

65. Judah al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni,* trans. David Simha Segal (Portland, Oregon: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001); *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes: His Fortunes and Adversities,* trans. W.S. Merwin (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005).

66. *The Arabian Nights,* trans. Husain Haddawy (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

67. On Malay literature in general, see Sir Richard Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1961); *The Book of Dede Korkut,* trans. Geoffrey Lewis (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974); *Darangen: in Original Maranao Verse with English Translation,* trans. Maria Delia Coronel, 8 vols. (Marawi City, Philippines: Folklore Division, University Research Center, Mindanao State University, 1986–1995).

68. Assïa Djebar, *Far from Madina* (London, U.K.: Quartet Books, 1994); *The History of al-Tabari,* 38 vols., general editor Ehsan Yar-Shater, various translators (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1985–1999).

69. Jorge Luis Borges, "Al-Hakim, the Masked Dyer of Merv," in *Borges, A Reader,* ed. Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alistair Reid (New York: Dutton, 1981).

70. *Sahih Al-Bukhari,* trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 6th ed., 9 vols. (Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1983); *An-Nawawi's Forty hadith,* trans. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1976).

71. *The Introductory Chapters of Yaqut's Mu'jam al-Buldan,* trans. Wadie Jwaideh (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959); *Hudud al-'Alam, The Regions of the World,* trans. Vladimir Minorsky (London, U.K.: Luzac, 1970).

72. On Islamic biography generally, see Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: the Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On Abu al-Faraj's work, see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs* (London, U.K.: Routledge-Curzon, 2003).

73. *The Life of Muhammad,* trans. Alfred Guillaume (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

74. *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition,* ed. Dwight F. Reynolds (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

75. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History,* trans. Franz Rosenthal, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967).

76. Shawkat M. Toorawa, "Selections from the Autograph Notes of 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi," in *Interpreting the Self,* ed. Reynolds, 156–164; Toorawa, "Travel in the Medieval Islamic World: The Importance of Patronage as Illustrated by 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (and other littérateurs)," in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travelers, 1050–1550,* ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2004), 57–70.

77. Emilie Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener, 1989).

78. *The Baburnama,* trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1996).

79. Ruzbihan Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master,* trans. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Parvardigar Press, 1997).

80. On the *Han Kitab,* see Zvi Ben-Dor-Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005).

81. *The Kashf al-Mahjub of al-Hujwiri,* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London, U.K.: Luzac, 1936); *Principles of Sufism by al-Qushayri,* trans. B.R. von Schlegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1992); *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya' by Farid al-Din Attar,* trans. A.J. Arberry (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

82. Imam al-Haddad, *The Book of Assistance,* trans. Mostafa Badawi (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1983); Muzaffer Ozek al-Jerrahi, *Adornment of Hearts,* trans. Muhtar Holland and Sixtina Friedrich (Westport, Connecticut: Pir Press, 1991).

83. *Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Rabi'a* (Putney, Vermont: Threshold Books, 1988).

84. *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa,* vol. 1: *Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings,* ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: J.E. Brill, 1996).

85. *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa,* vol. 2: *Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance: An Anthology,* ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

86. *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints) are the nine Sufis who are said to have spread Islam in Java. Their deeds are told in the sixteenth-century *Babad Tanah Jawa* (Chronicles of the Land of Java).

87. See, for example, Abd al-Rahman al-Jami, *Yusuf and Zulaikha: An Allegorical Romance,* trans. David Pendlebury (London, U.K.: Octagon Press, 1980); and

Forugh Farrokhzad, *Another Birth: Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season,* trans. Ismail Salami (Tehran: Zabankadeh, 2001).

88. See, for example, *Mir Taqi Mir, Selected Poetry,* trans. K.C. Kanda (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1997), and *Diwan-e Ghalib,* trans. Sarwat Rahman (New Delhi: Ghalib Institute, 2003).

89. See, for example Nazim Hikmet, *Beyond the Walls,* trans. Ruth Christie et al. (London, U.K.: Anvil Press Poetry, 2002).

90. See ‘Abdallah ibn ‘Ali ibn Nasir, *Al-Inkishafi: The Soul's Awakening,* trans. William Hichens (London, U.K.: Sheldon Press, 1939).

91. See for example, Khalil Gibran, *The Madman: His Parables and Poems* (Mineola, New York: Dover Press, 2002), and Agha Shahid Ali, *Call me Ishmael Tonight* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

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14

Moths and Scattered Flames: Some Thoughts on Islam and Poetry

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

Poetry is the original language of humankind. With a little imagination, it might even be said to be the original language of animals, those emotive creatures that must choose resemblances and learn to decode the meanings of things in order to survive. Or it might be the language of bees, those most poetic of insects, scanning the flowery countryside for nectar and pollen the way a good student might scan the lines of a great poem, metrically buzzing in heart and head.

I could even go so far as to say that poetry is the language of cells, who split and join, search and avoid, the way words fall into place to describe and evoke, emerging from silence. Or poetry might be the DNA language, which scans, has a recognizable meter, and a certain grammar or prosody of associations, markers, and signs. However, that might be going a bit too far, although only Allah knows how far we might go in the mysterious workings of the imagination that enters dimensions unreachable by reason alone, before we exceed or betray the truth.

Poetry is also the language of feeling, of spiritual states often and most purely beyond the reach of simple reason. In fact, in many cases symbolic or oblique language might be the best way to connect with the raw reality of things, of how things are, as well as states of intuition and realization that cannot be spoken of directly.

Allah gave Adam the wisdom of naming:

> And God taught Adam all names,
> then set them forth to the angels, and said,
> "Tell me these names, if you are truthful."
>
> (Qur'an 2:31)[1]

Were they the names of the angels, known only to Allah before, or of everything in creation in its pre-verbalized state, animals, plants, rocks, and

clouds? Adam suddenly had tongue and teeth and an articulation that brought the world into focused being, in a linguistic transparency, for the benefit of all humanity, a veritable (virtual?) dictionary of wisdom language: Poetry.

God said, "Adam, tell them the names."
And when he told them the names,
God said, "Did I not say to you that I know
the secret of the heavens and the Earth?
And I know what you reveal,
and what you have been hiding."

(Qur'an 2:33)

Without attempting anything like a formal commentary (*tafsir*), this verse-sign (*aya*) of the Qur'an is truly mysterious to me, and is at the heart of our being human. Were the angels unnamed before Adam named them, or, in another interpretation, did nothing have a "name" until Allah inspired Adam, may peace be upon him, with the linguistic representations of the glorious and multitudinous "things" of His creation? Did these and all other names spring from a secret that is known only to Allah? Is Allah referring only to the secrets (Ar. *sirr,* plural *asrar*) that we hold deep within our breasts? Or is it something wildly deeper, secrets of the universe so arcane that we have to struggle to name them, such that only with Allah's "dictionary of terms" can we ever hope to do so?

Rainer Maria Rilke, in the ninth of his *Duino Elegies,* echoes the Adamic mystery of this act of naming:

Are we, perhaps, *here* just to utter: house,
bridge, fountain, gate, jug, fruit-tree, window—
at most: column, tower, but to utter them, remember,
to speak in a way which the named never dreamed
they could be? Isn't that the hidden purpose
of this cunning earth, in urging on lovers,
to realize, through their rapture, a rapture for all?

(William Gass Translation)[2]

Rapture: Ah, the word that really opens us up to our urge toward true and vivid utterance!

Historically speaking (whether of our physical or spiritual history is of no consequence), I have a vision of the first humans (are we speaking of the first sacred pair, when no one else existed, and their progeny, or metaphorically, the thousands for whom the sacred pair are the prophetic and Gnostic epitome?) in the great mystery of the origins of our consciousness, speaking

Adam's prophetic "poetics" of association and perception, resemblances and decodings, from the deepest source that flows both from outward to inward and from inward to outward. This is what makes poetry, where previously there was only silence or *incommunication* (a new coinage meaning, no communication at all). Observations about light spraying through the trees, the weather, the grandeur and awesomeness of the Wooly Mammoth, or whatever it might be, the death of a parent, a child, an animal. The flight of an iridescent bird. The roar of an invisible assailant. The soothing of a wound or an injustice. A falling rock. The sighting of a new star. Which sound in the night to fear, and in which to find solace? Love-stirrings. Overpowering awe at God's Terrible Beauty.

If the roots of the Arabic language are, as it is claimed, deep in the soil of the human earth, and are at their base associative and many-faceted in meaning, then this protolanguage, which is also the Arabic language that is in use today, is itself a poetics, symbolic and evocative, even if the stilted flatness of journalism and the modern media have tried to iron all of its original poetry out of it.

André Breton, the French Surrealist, said, "Astonish me!" Should not believing Muslims be in an even more constant state of astonishment than French Surrealists? Out of the void, a lush world of existence blooms with all its streamers rippling in the cosmic winds. Irrational elements arise within it—mysteries, astonishments, and buffooneries. Yes, even buffooneries! As Dante shows us in the *Divina Commedia,* our proper attitude before God is one of bewilderment, where language stutters out of control to become the tongue-tied stuttering of ecstasy, given its proper latitude in the teachings of our Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, who was no poet and did not "practice" poetry. However, his revelation has shown us the poetic scope of truth's possibilities—epic grandeur couched in a language of deep and excavatable meanings—a text, capable, through the engagement of the heart and the mind, of yielding varied interpretations from the most literal and earth-surfaced signs or *ayat,* to those that are the most deeply plumbed, esoteric, and heart-stirred. However, as the Prophet himself cautioned, this grandeur is often beyond the reach of the human understanding, the intellect, and perhaps even of the secret of the soul—the *sirr*—in which case, the only true understanding of what Allah means is by the living embodiment of His words.

Often, the isolated root words of the Qur'an go back to a resonant concrete object as an image, a life-snapshot in motion of some actuality, a glimpse of reality that goes beyond materialism to the more "abstract" numinous realities that extend past the boundaries of all the living dimensions in both this world and the unseen. A familiarity with dictionaries such as E.W. Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* shows an abundance of abstract concepts that arise from root words referring to concrete details (the straightforward names of things) concerning camels, swords, light,

water, and so on.[3] Poetic analogies or "ideas" are extrapolated from these concretions, etherealized, internalized, and made multifaceted by the grammatical extensions of the basic root letters.

From this whirling ocean of worldliness words emerge, fall into formations, and even structured formalisms to become comprehensible sentences: bursts of word combinations, exclamations, questions, longings, the whole human gamut of expression that language, even flawed language, is privy to, which can soar to the angelic, but also can descend in guttural tailspins to the demonic. However, taking into account the Spanish poet Frederico García Lorca's understanding of the *duende,* the dark under-soul of our hearts, a different and less evil understanding of "demonic" might instead mean energetic and passionate illumination. William Blake, the most "Sufi" bard of the English language, often finds the energy of Heaven and Hell interchangeable, one with the light of the other, going to the source, as it were, of visionary enlightenment. This is why I prefer Blake to T.S. Eliot, because Blake understood with visionary immediacy the depths of Gnostic understanding. The Sufi poets Rumi, Ibn al-Farid, and Hafez would probably have found in Blake a true enlightened companion, but they would have found T.S. Eliot to be perhaps too excessively Churchy, pinched, and elitist, who distrusted "inspiration" as Blake and the Sufi poets experienced it. Think of Shams of Tabriz's "transgressive" attempts to expand Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi's heart to the true *ma'rifa* (immediate knowledge) of divine recognition.

However, words can also float on the surface of the heart-beating urge to speech, and while poetry can be very simple, at the same time it also engages one in complexities of response. Take Haiku, for example, the exquisitely wrought Japanese form of a few lines in a strict metric quantity. This has also been practiced in a way by the Iranian poet and filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami in the Persian (Farsi) language:

> Autumn sunshine—
> a lizard alert
> on the mud-brick wall.

(*Walking with the Wind: Poems of Abbas Kiarostami*)[4]

Often, the most disarmingly unselfconscious ditty will have the most resonant meanings, as in the case of Emily Dickinson in the American tradition of poetry, or again Blake, or some of Lorca's gypsy songs. When a poem lodges in our hearts because it is strange but somehow familiar, going into a place in our consciousness like a flashlight into an attic, beaming itself in unforeseen corners, or when it seems to have such potential, then, I think, we are looking at poetry. Poetry need not be "difficult" or "esoteric" at all, and may even be all surface, when it is a matter of true vision, an entirely new perspective from

an unforeseen angle as if from an otherworldly inspiration. Or it may be the torn heart in the throes of incredible yearning, a lament making up for its lack with utterance to bridge its feeling of separation.

When we look at the ecstatic poetry of Rumi (and even his more ‘‘sober’’ *Mathnawi* is a heart-opening, head-swirling experience), who always maintains the dimension of both loss and total unity—with jokes and asides and Gnostic teaching in-between, with giddiness, plainness, surreal but meaningful symbolism and abstract contemplation, and even a few buffooneries thrown in for good measure—we see the possibility of a true spiritual literature.

What I am getting at in a kind of irrational and impressionistic way is a very deep and passionate conviction that our most subterranean consciousness-soul is connected with the mysterious movements of the universe, and that the language of poetic utterance is what opens this connection up to us. If I say that the DNA is ‘‘reciting’’ poetry, or that the amoebas are poetic fiends, meandering around in a state of inspiration, I hope I can be forgiven, because it is from this conviction. Although poetic inspiration does partake of revelation, it in no way matches the Prophetic revelation, which comes unbidden and untaught through prophets and the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, whose only ‘‘poetic’’ skill was utter and unflagging truthfulness. In her book, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet,* Karen Armstrong comes very close to saying that the divine revelation of the Qur’an was an act of creativity on the part of the Prophet. Referring to this accomplishment, she says, ‘‘To *create* (italics mine) a literary masterpiece, to found a major religion and a new world power are not ordinary achievements.’’[5]

I would not say this. If the state of the Qur’anic revelation may be thought of as a mode of poetic action, then Allah is the poet, not the Prophet Muhammad. Still, *wahy*—revelatory inspiration—continues to exist in Islam, and to a lesser degree by far, the poetic project can ‘‘open sesame’’ many treasure vaults of truthful understanding, on the molecular as well as the stellar level. We are sentient pieces of lint floating in Allah’s vast universe, singing to ourselves. What are we singing? This is what touches my heart, this knowledge and the hope that what we sing elevates us to our true dimension, beyond, as Allah Most High says, that of the angels! I want to be a poet among the birds or among the high breakers of the sea. A poet of seismic convulsions and star-births. Star bursts! I can only do this by expunging myself as much as possible, by stepping aside to let the lightning speak on its own behalf, by bringing to the event a taste for language and a deepened and apprenticed skill in catching the fireflies of lightning in a mortal dimension, so that others (and myself) can view them without being burned entirely to a crisp. Prophecy and saintliness, however, do not work at ‘‘poetry.’’ They do not carry a notebook in a little shoulder bag for noting instant inspirations. They do not type out poems or send them to

magazines, hoping to be published. I cannot imagine Rumi worrying about getting published!

The Surrealists, the French mostly, but also the Latin American and Spanish Surrealists, as well as the *Mathnawi* of Rumi, were my opening to Qur'anic understanding. They went about creating expression in a new way, almost turning away their senses from the "object" in order to dig deeper and find a stratum unknown or unexpressed before. When Sufi poetry came along, I could recognize it for the expression of the spirit's elusiveness that it is, and hear the music of its language as if from Tahitian tom-toms, or better, from Balinese *gamelan* gongs, as if surging up from the bottom of the sea—or for the rational-minded, from the "unconscious" or "subconscious"—though I dive down and find phosphorescent fish in the dark, following the glow of their headlamps.

When my wife read my first stab at the opening paragraph of this chapter, she said that she found it a bit preposterous—animals speaking "poetry"! She felt that what made us human was the speech that no other creature has to our degree. However, I am not trying to get at the actuality of "poetry," but rather at the sublingual mechanisms of a metaphorical grasp of reality. Thus, the analogy holds for me that this is what other creatures do in their own poetic way. If they do not have language, then perhaps they are even closer to nature, which is also "non-verbal."

Language itself is a poem that floats on top of the "objective" or "concrete" world. If we look at a blade of grass for a long time, why do we call it "grass?" It is this long, green, blade—but already I am using poetic word-images, "long," "green," and "blade," to bring the thought to mind. In itself, it is simply what it is (sounds like a rap song!). I often amuse myself wondering what it might be that "grass" calls itself, if anything, or what "lions" call themselves, or "redwood trees." We call other peoples by names that we have given them, and are often surprised to find that they do not call themselves by the same names at all. "American Indians," for example: a name given to them by mistaken identity on the part of Columbus, who thought he had reached India. The people themselves might call themselves by a tribal name by which, somehow over time, they have become distinguished from other tribes. Very often, people in their own languages simply call themselves, "The People," although it may also be a kind of naïve arrogance to say that we are the only "real people" and that all the rest of us are lesser creatures. Thus, a blade of grass, "looking around," might think itself different from, say, a cloud, and call itself—well, you make one up. However, if you do make one up, it will be either a lovely, sibilant musical sound with no rational meaning, or a metaphorical analogy, such as "vertical verdant eyebrow with no eye that grows upward from the ground," or as Walt Whitman called it, "the handkerchief of the Lord," or "the beautiful uncut hair of graves."

All I am saying, really, is that poetry is the probing and expansive imagination living in the sounds and meanings of words. It is an act of heightened

speech to make the world more transparent and its more intimate meanings to emerge, even if evanescent or emotive. It is to get down to the core, to look more deeply into the flame before flying in. Better, it is to see the Names of Allah behind every manifestation, by virtue of verbal corrective lenses, and then to go through the manifest names to He who manifests them, Allah, the unified single Name that contains all names. This gets close to what Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib of Fez (may Allah protect his secret) says in his *Diwan:*

> Truly created beings are meanings projected in images.[6]

For me, the purpose of poetry is illumination, a form of remembrance (*dhikr*) with transformative capabilities. In poems, illumination springs either from the humblest beginnings of simple human events or earthly objects and situations in which the poetic imagination sees the galactic dimension, as it were, or from a self-contained inspiration (*wahy*) that comes unbidden, enters the heart, lays waste to the kingdom of control, and takes over utterance into a new articulation. Illumination and ecstasy: I call my website, "The Ecstatic Exchange," hoping that the reader on the other side is the gainful bargainer. Without this yearning or urge for a new wisdom, setting out in a poem seems like a humdrum project. The model for this can even be someone like Antonin Artaud, the great, mad French poet and theatrical theoretician, whose visceral screams in words show human energy at its most fearsome, but who shows the way for a poetry that tries to go somewhere uncharted, takes risks of life and limb, and is fearless. For me, Blake does this as well. In the modern age, many of the Beat Poets showed us all to go candidly and nakedly into raw thought and its bardic yawps to awaken the hearts and heads of the world.

Sufi poetry does nothing less than this, but in a way that is, perhaps, more Apollonian, to use a Western differentiation. This is because the illumination of the Sufi saints who wrote illuminative poems was beyond the dimensions of passionate rage or frustration, although they entered the high light of intense and often delirious compression. Something cosmically impersonal happens, even though the Sufi shaykh poets were full and complete (*kamil,* "perfect" in Arabic) human beings, the likes of which we rarely see today (although I think that they have always been rare). They are the proof of divine inspiration, the inspiration I think all poets long for when they set out to express the inexpressible. We pray for divine intervention between our hearts and our pens like nothing else. "Take me over!" we cry. "Don't let any of these words originate in me alone!"

In the world, but not of it: the great masters who are also poets illuminate others by their words, which glow from a burning core, and whose passage into the world opens our hearts to the glories of Allah. In this sense, poetry is pure praise.

The Lebanese–Syrian poet Adonis says in the final essay of his book, *The Pages of Day and Night*, that with the appearance of the Qur'an, the sense of divine inspiration was co-opted. According to Adonis, the Arab poets before the Qur'an went into deeper ''subconscious'' states, communicated with otherworldly forces, and were inspired by the unearthly, often attributing their brilliantly metaphorical allusions to helpful spirits (*jinn*). However, with the advent of the Qur'an and Islam, this approach became suspect (the art of poetry has always been suspect in Islam), and the poets were left with expressing reflective commentaries on the Qur'an, the pinnacle of Arabic poetics having been reached and surpassed by the Qur'anic language. An analogy of this is the way poets in English have Shakespeare's shadow to contend with, either imitating it or contradicting it. (One may be either like Hart Crane, a Shakespearean poet, or like William Carlos Williams, a plain speaker breaking from Shakespearean rhetoric, with inspirational jolts from Ezra Pound.) Adonis cynically sums up his view as follows:

> Islam did not suppress poetry as a form and mode of expression. Rather, it nullified poetry's role and cognitive mission, endowing it with a new function: to celebrate and preach the truth introduced by the Qur'anic revelation. Islam thus deprived poetry of its earliest characteristic—intuition and the power of revelation—and made it into a media tool.[7]

I think that this view is overly reductive, and that the post-Qur'anic Sufi shaykh–poets like Rumi or Fakhruddin Iraqi or Yunus Emre of Turkey went into their poetic states as true messengers. They were messengers of the truth but not messengers as prophets in the Qur'anic sense. However, they helped bring forth the continuous and uninterrupted message of the Qur'an from an imaginal realm that was, nonetheless, a lesser sibling of prophecy. After all, if dreams, according to the Hadith, are a fractional part of prophecy, then the poetry that springs from the same deep soul-sources must be a fractional ''part'' of prophecy as well. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, stated, ''In poetry is wisdom'' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). However, he also cautioned us against poetry's low excesses and its brutish exaggerations. These faults can be found, after all, in every human endeavor.

As a coda, bringing us back to my original claim for a kind of creaturely poetry, the American poet, Robert Duncan, in his *Structure of Rime* series, writes:

''In the Hive of Continual Images the Bees, angelic swarm, build in the visible cells a language in which they dance.''[8]

NOTES

This chapter first appeared online at www.deenport.com in 2005. It is reprinted here by permission of the author, who retains full rights to the chapter.

1. Thomas Cleary, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Chicago, Illinois: Starlatch Press, 2004), 2.

2. William H. Gass, *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 214.

3. See Edward William Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon* (1863 original repr., Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), two volumes.

4. *Walking with the Wind,* Poems by Abbas Kiarostami, (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, U.K.: A Harvard Film Archive publication, 2001), 85.

5. Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad, A Biography of the Prophet* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, A division of Harper Collins, 1992), 52.

6. *The Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib* (Cape Town, South Africa: Madinah Press, 2001), 75.

7. Adonis, *The Pages of Day and Night,* trans. Samuel Hazo (Evanston, Illinois: The Marlboro Press/Northwestern University Press, 2000), 102.

8. Robert Duncan, *Ground Work* (New York: New Directions, 1984), 54.

15

Medicine and Healing in Traditional Islam

Laleh Bakhtiar

Every religion emphasizes an aspect of the Truth. For Islam, the emphasis is on knowledge. With the light of grace as its source, knowledge is integrated into the principle of Unity or the Oneness of God (*tawhid*) that runs as the vertical axis through every mode of knowledge and being. The primary source of knowledge in traditional Islamic medicine is the Qur'an and the Hadith, the customs and sayings of God's Messenger Muhammad. The Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad is the Tradition of Islam. The Qur'an is the Logos or Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of 23 years. Each of the more than 6,600 verses of the Qur'an is called a Sign (*aya*), as is everything in the universe including the inner human self: "We shall show them Our Signs upon the horizons and within themselves until it is clear to them that it is the Real (the Truth)" (Qur'an 41:53).[1]

The Qur'an and the Tradition of Islam are seen as extensions of nature, in which the cosmos and the natural order overflow with divine grace (*baraka*). The cosmos is the manifested Word of God and the natural order is the macrocosmic Sunna (*Sunnat Allah,* Qur'an 48:23), the perfect model in following the Word of God. The human being's relationship with nature ideally comprises a sense of unity and oneness. Through knowledge gained by contemplating nature in all its facets, the human being learns to read God's Signs and act upon them, thus becoming a channel of divine grace. The Qur'an encourages the human being to seek knowledge in all its facets.[2] Over more than 1,400 years of Islamic history, this quest for knowledge has led to the development of what has been called the "Medicine of the Prophet" (*tibb al-nabi*) or "Prophetic Medicine" (*al-tibb al-nabawi*).

Three degrees of knowledge are expressed in the Qur'an: knowledge by inference (*'ilm al-yaqin,* "the Knowledge of Certainty," 102:5), knowledge by perception or observation (*'ayn al-yaqin,* "the Eye of Certainty,"

102:7), and knowledge by experience or intuition (*haqq al-yaqin,* "the Truth of Certainty," 69:51). The first type of knowledge depends primarily on inductive reasoning and leads to knowledge as a probability. The second type of knowledge is based on perception or empirical scientific observation. This corresponds to "the facts as I see them." The third type of knowledge depends on experience, or at times, spiritual intuition.[3]

There are many Traditions related from the Prophet Muhammad regarding knowledge. "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave." "To seek knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, whether man or woman." "Seek knowledge, even if it be in China." "He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God." "He who seeks knowledge does not die."[4] Medicine and healing in the Islamic world began with the Medicine of the Prophet and expanded over the centuries to include what is today known as "Islamic Medicine." Underlying both the Medicine of the Prophet and Islamic Medicine was a form of practical philosophy (*hikma 'amaliyya*), which today is understood as "Moral Healing."

When the Muslims encountered other cultures and civilizations that had preceded Islam, they were able to integrate the arts of medicine from these other cultures including Greece, India, and Persia. They preserved and perfected these medicinal arts at a time when, in the case of Greek knowledge; for example, the civilization that had been its basis had declined and lost its body of knowledge. Extending as it did from Spain to Southeast Asia, the Islamic world was able to incorporate much of this knowledge with just one caveat: the body of knowledge that was incorporated into Islamic medicine could not contradict the belief in One God. This was true of many sciences, including the science of medicine and healing.

One of the greatest Muslim theologians, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), taught that the study and practice of medicine is *fard kifaya:* it is necessary for a sufficient number of Muslims to learn medicine in order to meet the community's needs. Many practitioners of Prophetic Medicine expressed the view that "after faith, the practice of medicine is the most meritorious service in God's sight."[5]

THE MEDICINE OF THE PROPHET

The goal of the Medicine of the Prophet is to restore the nature created by God (*fitrat Allah*) from imbalance back to balance. This nature is referred to in the Qur'an: "Set thy face, [oh Muhammad], as a primordial monotheist (*hanifan*), toward the nature of God (*fitrat Allah*), upon which He has created the human being. There is no changing the creation of God. That is the upright religion, but most people know it not" (Qur'an 30:30). In the view of Islam, the human being is not born in a state of original sin, but in a state originated by God. This natural disposition is a nature that has the

potential to sense the order, balance, harmony, and equilibrium in the universe as well as within the self. The acceptance of this nature originated by God comes from the covenant that the human being accepted when God formed the human soul (*nafs*) by blowing the Divine Spirit into it (Qur'an 7:172). This is what gives meaning to the human being. Having accepted the covenant at creation as part of the nature originated by God, the human being was then given the trust of nature as God's representative on Earth (Qur'an 33:72).

As the trustee of the natural world, human beings have certain duties and obligations that were acknowledged as part of their original nature. Prophets are sent by God to remind human beings of their duties and obligations and the rewards or punishments for performing or not performing these obligations. In this sense, every revealed book sent by Allah through a Prophetic Messenger is a reminder (*dhikra*). Revelation is of two kinds: First, the created order is itself a revelation, and second, the Revealed Books of Allah's Messengers are an additional kind of revelation that serve as a reminder and a source of guidance from God.

Many verses of the Qur'an refer to God as the ultimate Healer and to the Qur'an as a means of healing. "When I am ill, it is [God] who cures me" (Qur'an 26:80). "We reveal from the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy for the believers" (Qur'an 17:82). "If God touches you with affliction, none can remove it but He" (Qur'an 6:17). "Oh humankind! There has come to you counsel from your Lord and a healing for what is in your hearts; this is a guidance and a mercy for the believers" (Qur'an 10:57).

The Qur'an also gives guidance that promotes good health: "Oh people, eat what is lawful and wholesome from [the foods of] the Earth" (Qur'an 2:168). The Qur'an also counsels people to select the best foods (Qur'an 18:19) and enjoy them: "Eat of the good things that we have provided for you" (Qur'an 7:160). Moderation is stressed: "Eat and drink, but do not be profligate" (Qur'an 7:31), as well as the avoidance of excess (Qur'an 20:81). Muslims are also enjoined to fast from food and drink during the daytime hours of the month of Ramadan, to learn self-restraint (Qur'an 2:183).

Prohibited actions in the Qur'an that lead to an imbalance in health include the eating of pork and alcohol consumption.[6] The Qur'an also forbids excessive eating, which leads to obesity and other medical problems: "Eat and drink, but do not be excessive" (Qur'an 7:31). Good health is considered a great blessing in Islam. On the Day of Judgment, the human being will be questioned about how she respected and maintained the blessings of God that she received: "Then you will be questioned about [God's] blessings on that day" (Qur'an 102:8). The Qur'an establishes three general rules for the maintenance of health and well-being: the preservation of bodily health, the expulsion of harmful substances, and protection from harm that might occur to the body from unlawful or injudicious actions. In his

book, *Medicine of the Prophet,* the noted Hanbali scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE) comments on how the Qur'an applies each of these rules:

> In the Qur'anic verses on fasting, the preservation of health is emphasized as a greater requirement than the religious obligation to fast. "If any of you are ill or on a journey, [then fasting should be made up from] a set number of other days" (Qur'an 2:184). Ibn Qayyim comments, "[God] permitted a sick person to break the fast because of illness, and [He permitted] the traveler [to break the fast] in order to preserve his health and strength. [This is because] fasting while traveling might cause injury to health through the combination of vigorous movements and the consumption of vital bodily energy, which often is not properly replaced due to lack of food. Thus, He permitted the traveler to break his fast."[7]

With regard to the expulsion of harmful substances, the Qur'an states: "If any of you are sick or has an ailment in his head, then [he can make] compensation [for not being able to complete the Hajj pilgrimage] by fasting, almsgiving, or sacrifice" (Qur'an 2:196). Ibn Qayyim explains: "[God] gave permission to the sick and to anyone with an ailment in his head . . . to shave his head while in the state of pilgrim sanctity (*ihram*). This was to evacuate the harmful vapors that brought about the ailment to his head through being congested beneath the hair. When the head is shaved, the pores are opened and these vapors make their way out. This kind of evacuation is used to draw an analogy for all other kinds of evacuation where the congestion of matter would cause harm."[8]

Ten actions of the body considered to cause imbalance when they are blocked or restrained are the following: the blood when agitated, the semen when moving, urine, feces, gastric gases, vomiting, sneezing, sleep, hunger, and thirst. Ibn Qayyim continues: "The Most High drew attention to the least significant [aspect of impurity]—the vapor congested in the head—to indicate the importance of evacuating what is more serious. Such is the method of the Qur'an: to give instruction about the greater through mentioning the lesser. In the verse of ablution the Most High refers to protection from harm: 'If you are sick or on a journey, or one of you comes from the privy, or you have been in contact with women, and you can find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth' (Qur'an 4:34). He permitted the sick person to desist from using water and to use earth instead, in order to protect the body against harm. Here again, attention is drawn to take the necessary precautionary measures against anything which could harm the body internally or externally."[9]

Treatment of illness by the Prophet Muhammad as recorded in the Hadith was of three kinds: treatment with natural medicines, treatment with "divine medicines" (recitation of the Qur'an and prayers), and treatment with a combination of these two. However, a traditional doctor or a physician (*hakim*)

never treated a physical illness without paying attention to the moral aspect of healing as well. As one of the better-known exponents of the Medicine of the Prophet, Ibn Qayyim commented that the moral dimension of healing was part of God's Law (*Shariʿa*): "As for the guidance of the Prophet on physical medicine, it came as a completion of his religious law (*al-Shariʿa*) and was equally to be used when needed."[10] At another place in the text, he noted, "Restoration of the body without restoration of the heart is of no benefit. However, damage to the body when the spirit is restored brings only limited harm, for it is a temporary damage that will be followed by a permanent and complete cure."[11]

A tradition from Usama ibn Sharik reported the following discussion: "I was with the Prophet when a Bedouin came and asked him, 'Oh Messenger of God, do we have to take medicine for treatment of illnesses?' The Prophet said, 'Yes. Oh servants of God, take medicine, for God Almighty has not created a disease without having created a remedy for it except one disease.' When they asked what this disease was, he said, 'Old age.'" Ibn Qayyim comments on this tradition:

> It is possible that [the Prophet's] words, "For every disease there is a remedy," are to be taken in a general sense, so as to encompass fatal illnesses and those which no physician can cure. In that case, God the Most Glorious has appointed remedies to cure them but has concealed the knowledge of such remedies from humankind, and has not given the human being the means to discover them. For created beings have no knowledge, except what God teaches.
>
> Therefore, the Prophet indicated that healing is dependent on the concurrence of the medicine with the illness. For every created entity has an opposite and every disease has an opposite as a remedy by which it can be treated. The Prophet also indicated that the cure is dependent on the suitability of the remedy to the disease, in addition to its mere existence. For when a medicine is too potent for the illness or is administered in excess, it transforms the original illness into another. When [the cure] is insufficient for the illness, it does not fully combat it and the treatment is defective; when the healer is unable to identify the right medicine, healing does not result. When the body is not receptive [to the medicine] or the faculties are incapable of bearing it, or there is some other factor preventing its influence, a cure will not be obtained, because of the lack of compatibility. But when there is complete compatibility, a cure must inevitably occur. This is the best of the two assumptions in the traditions.
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> The second assumption is that within the general meaning it is the particular which is intended, especially seeing that what is contained within an expression is much greater than what comes out from it and this is common usage in every language. Thus, the meaning would be: God has not made any disease that can be treated without making a remedy for it. This does not include those diseases which are not receptive to medicine.[12]

As for those who are reluctant to seek any treatment at all for their illnesses, Ibn Qayyim reassures them that seeking treatment does not negate trust in

God's will (*tawakkul*) any more than does eating or drinking to repel hunger or thirst. He states: "The reality of the divine unity is only made complete by direct use of the means that God has appointed as being essential to bring about certain effects, according to God's command and the Shari'a."[13]

From the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, the Prophet and many of his followers would recite verses of the Qur'an to a sick person as a method of healing. This practice was known as *ruqya*. The Medicine of the Prophet sees the healing effects of the recitation of the Qur'an to be achieved in two ways: through the meaning of the Qur'an for those who understand it and through the sound of the Arabic words of the Qur'an, even for those who do not understand.

The Traditions also refer to the healing power of scents: "A sweet scent is the nourishment of the spirit; the spirit is the instrument of the faculties, and the faculties increase with scent. For it is beneficial for the brain and the heart and the other internal organs; it makes the heart rejoice, pleases the soul, and revitalizes the spirit."[14]

Listening to singing was also recommended as a means of healing by some physicians. According to the Egyptian scholar Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505 CE): "Listening to singing is the scent of souls, the calmer of hearts, and the food of the spirit. It is among the most important kinds of psychological medicine. It is a cause of pleasure, even for some animals. Pleasure in moderation purifies the innate heat [of the body], strengthens the function of the faculties, slows down senile decay by driving out diseases, renders the complexion clearer, and refreshes the whole body. By contrast, an excess of pleasure makes the illnesses of the body increase."[15] There was a difference of opinion on the legality of listening to music. Some scholars saw a benefit in music, but others could not differentiate between music that inflamed the passions and music that fostered spirituality and healing. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889 CE), who was perhaps the most famous cultural historian of the Abbasid period (750–1258 CE), fully approved of the psychological and medicinal effects of music and especially singing. He wrote, "Songs and harmonious chants clarify the brain, sweeten the character, animate the soul, clear the blood, improve and help persons with thick diseases, and develop all the natural qualities of a human being. Listening to singing is recommended in the treatment of some diseases, especially those due to spleen."[16]

However, the main method of treatment associated with the Medicine of the Prophet was with drugs made from plants and herbs, which were known as "simples" in Islamic pharmaceutical vocabulary. Muslim physicians divided drugs into two categories: "simples" (*mufradat*) and "compounds" (*murakkabat*). Simples are drugs in their natural state, and which have not been combined with other drugs to make compounds. Each "simple" drug was thought to possess its own nature and interacted with the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air, to bring the bodily humors back into balance. The use of simple drugs was thus related both to the temperament of the

patient and to the temperament of the drug itself, which derived from the nature of its source in a particular plant or herb. The Medicine of the Prophet relied mostly on simples. Knowledge of the nature of simple drugs and their herbal sources played a major role in the traditional pharmacology of medieval Islam. Some modern scholars use the term ''pharmacognosy'' to characterize this knowledge, because it combined empirical knowledge of the properties of plants with a subtler and more esoteric knowledge of their natures.[17]

Another method used in the Medicine of the Prophet was incantation. A tradition that is reproduced in the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud, the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and the *Sunan* of Tirmidhi states that a person asked the Prophet Muhammad: ''Oh Messenger of God, do you consider incantations a suitable means of treatment, and are they useful for protection? Do they turn back anything from God's decree?'' He replied, ''They are part of God's decree.''[18] Even today, many Muslims in traditional communities continue to rely on prayer, fasting, incantations, and the recitation of certain verses of the Qur'an as approaches to healing. In the past, treatments based on the medicinal properties of minerals and plants were supplemented by charms that were based on the science of letters and numbers. Talismans or amulets were often used as alternative forms of treatment in the Medicine of the Prophet.

The underlying philosophy in the treatment of illness as expressed in the Medicine of the Prophet and later in Islamic Medicine was that the body has the power to preserve and restore balance through its God-given power of self-preservation. Therefore, the role of medicine and the physician was to help this power function by removing any obstacles that may be present in the body that obstruct the natural balance of humors and the flow of bodily fluids. In this view, regaining health is achieved by the body itself and any form of treatment simply helps this process by assisting the natural life force.

THE *HAKIM:* THE ISLAMIC PHYSICIAN

In the early centuries of Islamic history, physicians were usually of Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian background. The use of Christians and Jews as physicians continued well into the medieval period. However, Muslims began to enter the profession in the second century of Islam (mid-eighth century CE). Eventually, the position of physician evolved into that of the *hakim* (wise person or sage), who was both a physician and a philosopher and often a master of other Islamic sciences as well. Many famous Muslim philosophers were also physicians. These included three of the most famous philosophers in Islam, Muhammad ibn Abu Zakariyya al-Razi (Rhazes, d. 925 CE), Abu 'Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE), and Muhammad Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198 CE). Theoretical studies of the Medicine of the

Prophet and Islamic Medicine were often taught in a traditional school of higher education, the *madrasa*. Clinical medicine, however, was taught in hospitals, which were often attached to a *madrasa* that specialized in medical subjects.[19] Private instruction was also available, especially in the area of pharmacology.

Wherever the physician was taught, he was required to develop certain personal characteristics in order to practice his craft. The following is a description of the attributes of a physician from the famous work, *Chahar Maqala* (Four Treatises):

> The physician should be of a tender disposition and a wise nature, and excelling in acumen, this being a nimbleness of mind in forming correct views; that is to say, a rapid transition to the unknown from the known. No physician can be of a tender disposition if he fails to recognize the nobility of the human soul; nor can he be of a wise nature unless he is acquainted with logic, nor can he excel in acumen unless he is strengthened by God's aid. He who is not acute in conjecture will not arrive at a correct understanding of any ailment, for he must derive his indications from the pulse, which has a systole, a diastole, and a pause intervening between these two movements.[20]

The well-known *Ethics of the Physician* (*Adab al-Tabib*), by Ishaq ibn 'Ali al-Ruhawi, gives directives on medical ethics and what today would be called "bedside manners." Ruhawi discusses what the doctor should ask of the patient and the nurse, what the patient may conceal from the physician, and what the physician should inform the patient under his or her treatment. The contemporary Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr sums up the attributes of the traditional Islamic physician in the following way: "The physician was expected to be a man of virtuous character, who combined scientific acumen with moral qualities, and whose intellectual power was never divorced from deep religious faith and reliance upon God."[21]

The Egyptian writer Suyuti refers to many traditions that showed that in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, women were permitted to give medical treatment to men, even though they were not close relations. Some of these traditions are recorded in the reliable collection called *Sahih Muslim*, such as when one woman reported: "We journeyed with the Prophet Muhammad in seven raids. I traveled in the rear with the baggage. I prepared their food and I treated the sick and wounded." Another tradition recounts: "The Prophet once made a raid and took with him Umm Saylam, and with her came the womenfolk of the Helpers. They used to carry round the drinking water and treat the wounded."[22] Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) said that it was lawful for a male physician to examine a woman, even though she was not a relative, and even in forbidden places.[23] Suyuti similarly said that it was lawful for a woman to look at the forbidden parts of a man in case of necessity. He then concludes his section by saying, "If a man dies among

women or a woman dies among men, the women are allowed to wash the corpse of the man and the men that of the woman.''[24]

The job of the Islamic physician is to learn to read the signs of imbalance in both its empirical and its qualitative aspects. Whereas the empirical aspects of systemic imbalance appear in the sensible world and allow direct observation and experimentation, the qualitative aspects can only be known indirectly by the effects that they produce. Whereas empirical knowledge speaks through the signs of outer forms and observed reality ''on the horizons,'' the qualitative dimension of knowledge speaks through signs of meaning that appear more subtly, within the nature of the patient himself or herself. In the words of the Holy Qur'an: ''We shall show them our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it becomes manifest to them that it is the Truth'' (Qur'an 41:53).

ISLAMIC MEDICINE: THEORY

Islamic Medicine deals with the inborn nature of the patient in an attempt to maintain health and restore the person to health whenever the inner equilibrium of the patient is lost. The work of the physician is to achieve a dynamic balance between all aspects of the human person. This approach is holistic in theory, practice, diagnosis, and treatment.[25] Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the famous Islamic philosopher and physician and the author of the influential textbook *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine), defines medicine as the branch of knowledge that deals with the states of health and disease in the human body for the purpose of employing suitable means for preserving or restoring health. According to Ibn Sina and other traditional physicians, the theory of Islamic Medicine is divided into four parts: the constitution of the patient, the state of the body of the patient, the etiology of disease, and symptoms or signs of disease in the patient.

The Constitution of the Patient

The constitution of the patient has seven components: (1) the four elements and their qualities, (2) temperament, (3) the four humors, (4) the fundamental organs, (5) the souls, (6) the faculties, (7) the functions of attraction and repulsion.

The Four Elements and Their Qualities

The concept of the four elements was inherited by Islamic Medicine from the Greek medical tradition, through the translated works of Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Galen.[26] The four elements are earth, air, fire, and water. Earth and water are heavy, and air and fire are light. The heavy elements are

considered strong, negative, passive, earthly, and female. The light elements are weak, positive, active, heavenly, and male.

The element of earth is located at the center of our existence. It is made of gross matter (*madda*). Because of the inherent weight that this element possesses, it remains at rest while the other elements are pulled toward it by means of attraction. Ibn Sina explained the force of gravity as the "attraction" or "inclination" (*mayl*) of lighter objects toward the heavy earth.[27] The element of earth within our bodies fixes and holds our bodies in place. Its gross materiality forms the building block of the skeleton.

The element of water allows things to be shaped, molded, and spread. It has a tendency to sag or droop and forms the building block of the muscles. The element of air refines things and makes them lighter so that they can ascend easily. It is the building block of the circulatory system. It is also the building block of the breath (*nafas,* related to *nafs,* "soul"), as it moves in and out of the physical form of the body, making involuntary movement possible. The element of fire rarifies, refines, and mixes things. It penetrates air and overcomes the coldness of earth and water. It forms the basic building block of the liver.

Each of the four elements has two primary qualities. Earth is cold and dry, water is cold and wet, air is hot and wet, and fire is hot and dry. Many descriptions of the four elements can be found in medieval medical and scientific texts from the Islamic world. It is clear from all of these texts that the four elements of Islamic Medicine are not what we call earth, air, water, and fire. They are more than the earth we walk on, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the fire we use to cook our food. Rather, they are manifestations of primary matter, subtle qualities that our bodies contain. The quality of moisture within the elements of water and air dispels dryness and protects things from crumbling; the quality of dryness in earth and air prevents moisture from dispersing. The four elements are continuously in motion, making changes within the body. These changes can be either cyclical or progressive. The changes involved in eating food, digesting food, and eliminating waste are cyclical because they are repeated in the same manner. The growth of a cancerous tumor, however, is an example of progressive change because it creates a condition in the body that has not existed before.

Substances (sing. *jawhar*) are either simple or compound. The four elements are simple substances that provide the primary matter for the components of the human body. It is through these four elements and their qualities that bodies gain shape and mass. However, mass needs energy to move. This energy comes from the properties of heat and cold, which act upon the elements in the body. Heat and cold are active properties of energy, while moisture and dryness are passive qualities of matter. Although a person can speak of these qualities separately, in action they are inseparable. For instance, heat provides kinetic energy to the atoms of the body because it possesses both rapid and random motion.

Temperament

Temperament is unique to each individual. In Islamic Medicine, no two persons can be treated alike medically because they have different temperaments. Temperament refers to the metabolic constitution of a person and one's pattern of behavior. Temperament was thought to be partially dependent on one's astrological sign or constellation at birth and on one's place of conception. If the temperament is balanced, there is no need for medical treatment. An illness creates an imbalance in the temperament. There are eight different kinds of imbalance in temperament. Four are simple: an imbalance in heat, cold, dryness, or moisture. Four are compound: an imbalance in the combination of heat and dryness, an imbalance in the combination of heat and moisture, an imbalance in the combination of cold and dryness, and an imbalance in the combination of cold and moisture.

The temperament of a person comes about primarily from the interaction of the qualities of the four elements acting on the components of the body. For example, blood is hot and moist. If a person were to sleep excessively or to become exposed to cold, the natural heat of the blood would dissipate and the result would be too much moisture. The diagnosis of this condition would be an "imbalance of the hot temperament of the blood," and treatment would be given accordingly. The breath, blood, and liver are considered the hottest components of the body. When they are out of balance by being too hot, herbs with the quality of cold are given to restore balance. Hair, bones, and cartilage are considered the coldest components of the body. Oil, fat, and the brain are considered wet components, while ligaments, tendons, and the serous membranes are dry components. A "hot imbalance" is hotter than it should be but not moister or drier. A "cold imbalance" is colder than it should be but not moister or drier. A "dry imbalance" is drier than it should be but not hotter or colder. A "moist imbalance" is wetter than it should be but not hotter or colder.

An imbalance in temperament can be either qualitative or material. If the imbalance is qualitative, it does not affect an organ directly. For example, a fever is a qualitative imbalance of temperament because it does not affect a particular organ of the body. A material imbalance directly invades an organ of the body and causes change. A cancerous tumor causes a material imbalance in temperament because it directly affects a particular part of the body.

The Egyptian scholar Suyuti considered the temperament of the Prophet Muhammad to have been the most balanced of human temperaments. This was because his moral character and the temperament of his body were in perfect equilibrium. A tradition related from 'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet, states, "His character is the Qur'an." Since the Qur'an, as God's revelation to humanity, is the embodiment of divine justice and truth, the Prophet's temperament was also justly balanced because his character corresponded to God's justice and truth. Conversely, if the Prophet's temperament were the

most balanced of temperaments, then his character must have been the best of characters as well.[28]

The Humors

Each of the four elements relates to a corresponding humor, substances that are made up of quasi-material or semi-gaseous vapors. The humor of blood (Sanguineous Humor) relates to air, so that it is hot and moist when balanced. The humor of phlegm (Serous Humor) relates to water, so that it is cold and moist when balanced. The humor of yellow bile (Bilious Humor) relates to fire, and is hot and dry when balanced. The humor of black bile (Atrabilious Humor) relates to earth, so that it is cold and dry when balanced.

The four humors were first observed by the Greek physician Hippocrates, who noticed four mixtures in the blood. The red portion of the blood he related to the humor of blood, the white material mixed with the blood he designated as the humor of phlegm, the yellow froth on top of the blood he called the yellow bile humor, and the black bile humor was related to the heavy part of the blood that settles to the bottom when the blood is precipitated. The four humors were later refined by Galen, who observed that all illness and disease were the result of an imbalance in the humors. The Muslim philosopher and physician Ibn Sina added two fluids to the humors as secondary humors: intracellular fluids and extracellular fluids. He further observed that the four primary humors arise out of the digestive process. He believed that the primary humors and the fluids were used as nutrients for the maintenance, growth, and repair of the organs, as well as for supplying the energy necessary to do work.

Existing as they do in a kinetic state, the humors are continuously adjusting and mixing with the body's organs, fluids, and tissues. The preservation of the vital force or immune system of the body depends on the balance of the humors. Any treatment given for an imbalance in the humors is to help the body regain this ability. According to the theory of humors, the four humors arise in the liver, depending on the nature of the food that one eats and the degree of digestion that follows. The liver first forms the blood humor (hot and moist) from the best of the nutrients in the food that has been eaten. Then the phlegm humor (cold and moist) arises as part of the next stage of the digestive process. In normal digestion, the phlegm humor changes into mucus, saliva, and gastric and intestinal mucus. If there is a problem at this stage because of the quality of the food ingested, excess mucus is formed, which is then classified as sweet, sour, thick, or thin.

The coarser and less refined products of the digestive process form the yellow bile humor (hot and dry). This humor is stored in the gall bladder, renders the blood subtle, and helps it pass through the narrow channels of the veins and arteries. Part of the yellow bile humor is carried to the bowels and produces the color of the feces. The sediment that is left over comes from

the least digestible and least usable parts of the nutrients ingested; these materials form the black bile humor (cold and dry). When balanced, the black bile humor feeds the spleen and forms the bones. Part of the black bile humor passes to the opening of the stomach, where it creates stomach acidity and the hunger for food. This humor was considered the most toxic of the four humors and was thought to be responsible for cancerous growths in the body. When it is out of balance, the black bile humor passes out of the liver in the form of ash or it mixes with the other three humors and causes various morbid conditions.

The Fundamental Organs

The organs of primary importance are the brain, the heart, the liver, and the generative organs, the testicles or ovaries. The nerves serve the brain, the arteries serve the heart, the veins serve the liver, the spermatic vessels serve the testicles, and the fallopian tubes serve the ovaries. The vital power or innate heat of the body comes from the heart. Mental faculties and the powers of perception and movement are located in the brain, whereas the source of the nutritive and vegetative faculties is the liver. The generative organs, the testicles and ovaries, produce masculine and feminine genders and form the elements of reproduction.

The Souls

The psychological aspect of Islamic Medicine is based on the concept of two souls, or more accurately, one soul that is divided into secondary souls or functions. The first of these souls is the rational soul (*al-nafs al-ʿaqliyya*), which governs the cognitive system and the ability to reason. The second is the animal soul (*al-nafs al-hayawaniyya*), which governs the instincts and passions, especially the attraction to pleasure and the instinct to repel harm or danger. This soul is called the animal soul because the instincts and passions are shared by both human beings and animals. The goal of traditional psychology, or the "science of souls" (*ʿilm al-nufus*) in Islam, is to maintain a balance between these two souls.[29] As in physical Islamic Medicine, the medicine of souls sees health as a state of equilibrium, in which the instincts, desires, and impulses that act on the human being are controlled and are in balance.

When the rational soul and the animal soul are in equilibrium, the emotions are balanced by reason. Simple imbalances occur because of a "quantitative" imbalance, in which certain aspects of the soul become too active or too passive, or they may occur because of a qualitative imbalance, in which one of the aspects of the soul is missing or not utilized. Compound imbalances result from the rational soul and the animal soul acting together in such a way that the passional aspects overcome the rational aspects.

The desire for pleasure, a major aspect of the animal soul, is known as the "affective system." It is the most basic aspect of the animal soul and is the first to develop in the human personality. Its purpose is to preserve the human species. This aspect of the animal soul comes into play when one yields to the influence of inner passions or outer stimuli. The virtue that restores a sense of balance to the passions and the desire for pleasure is temperance. Too much desire shows itself as greed; too little desire connotes a lack of self-esteem; a lack of emotional responsiveness or affect may indicate envy.

The avoidance of pain is another important aspect of the animal soul. This instinct (*ghariza*) forms the psychological basis of the "behavioral system." Shared by both humans and animals, the instinct of pain avoidance exists in order to preserve the life of the individual. Because it is an instinct, it is preconscious, and thus capable of being disciplined, whereas the affective system that governs passion and desire is unconscious. The virtue that brings the "fight or flight" tendencies of this aspect of the soul into balance is courage. Too much courage shows itself as anger or recklessness and may lead to the love of power and ambition. Too little courage results in cowardice and imaginary fears or phobias.

When they are given too much free rein in the human personality, the affective and behavioral systems of the animal soul may corrupt the rational soul. This results in the loss of reason and the inability to rationally exercise free will; by themselves, these aspects of the animal soul do not utilize reason. As preconscious instincts or unconscious processes, they instead utilize inner impulses and the imagination to move the self toward seeking pleasure or avoiding harm. The psychic "motion" that they cause within the self is what we call emotion. The affective system seeks love and pleasure whereas the behavioral system avoids hate and pain. Both systems were thought to be located in the heart. However, the affective system receives its energy from the liver. This energy flows through the veins, causing the attraction to pleasure. The desire for pleasure is the most basic drive of human nature. Unlike the affective system, the behavioral system receives its energies from the heart through the arteries.

Reason (*ʿaql*), the property of the rational soul, belongs to the human being alone. While the purpose of the affective system is to preserve the species and the purpose of the behavioral system is to preserve the individual, the purpose of the cognitive system is to preserve consciousness. Consciousness is defined as the exercise of free will and the development of a conscience with which to balance free will. Whereas the animal soul is instinctive and is fully formed at birth, the rational soul develops as one grows and matures. The nature of its quantitative and qualitative development depends upon the processes of nurturing and education. The highest virtue achieved by the rational soul is wisdom (*hikma*). Too little wisdom shows itself as ignorance (*jahl*); the development of knowledge without wisdom leads to

hypocrisy (*nifaq*). A lack of the qualitative function of the rational soul results in disbelief in God (*shirk* or *kufr*). The goal of Islamic psychology is the same as the goal of Islamic Medicine as a whole: to maintain balance, harmony, and equilibrium between the rational soul and the animal soul. The outward sign of inner balance is when a person manifests a sense of fairness and justice. Such a person is then referred to as being "centered."[30]

The Faculties and Energies

The faculties of the human body are the natural faculties, the vital faculties, and the nervous faculties. In Islamic Medicine, the human being is considered as a complete system that makes use of the energy transformed from food and air to satisfy its various natural dispositions. Energy moves from perception to motivation and motivation to perception. Motivation is the seat of impulses toward inclinations, which are imprinted on the external and internal senses. Then, through filtering into the practical intellect, a response is given. Three sources of energy are active in this perspective: natural or physical (venial) energy, vital (arterial) energy, and nervous energy. These transformed energies are distributed throughout the body.

Natural or Physical Energies: The natural or physical energies are twofold. One, located in the liver, where the humors are also formed, is responsible for the preservation of the individual and therefore supplies energy for nutrition and growth. The other is located in the testicles and ovaries and is responsible for the sexual functions to preserve the human race. The nutritive function works through subordinate systems: retention, digestion, assimilation, and expulsion. The humors move by natural energy through the veins carrying sustenance to the body. A natural appetite, guided by nature in its mode of operation, instructs these various energies.

Vital Energy of the Heart: Some natural energies and humors enter the cavity of the heart through transformation. There, they become vital energy, a substance that is less gross than the humors in the liver. The heart is the seat of life, of heat, of pulse, of the vital energies, and of nature in its mode of operation. It is the organ that lives first and dies last. Vital energies are carried to the organs of the body by arteries. They make life possible. They are transformed in the brain, where they become nervous energy. This makes perception and motivation possible.

Nervous Energy: Nervous energy arises in the brain from the vital energy that reaches it from the heart. The brain, where the cognitive functions are located, is the center of motivation and perception. Motivation stimulates movement, and perception consists of the external and internal senses. In the cognitive system, vital energy from the heart is distributed to the nervous system, whereas the affective system receives natural energy through the veins and the behavioral system receives vital energy through the arteries.

During the early stages of human development, before the cognitive system is fully formed, the systems of affect and behavior use the natural and vital energies for nutrition, growth, and development. They invest energy in objects that appear to fulfill the needs of attracting pleasure and avoiding harm. However, because the systems of affect and behavior do not function cognitively, when their needs are not met, they automatically seek to displace their energies toward another object. Through observation and imitation, most often under the guidance of parents, the individual gradually develops cognition. Cognition allows the person to become selective and to choose what best satisfies the basic needs. The cognitive system is endowed by nature with the ability to identify and match the mental image arising out of a need with a real perception that will satisfy a natural disposition. Whereas the affective and behavioral systems cannot differentiate between the impression of a desired object and the object itself, the cognitive system may come to know through learning that the impression and the real object are different and that the impression must conform to something real. The moral and religious training imparted by prophets, spiritual masters, and other teachers builds on this basic training or education (*tarbiyya*).

The Functions

The primary functions or responses associated with the body and the human personality are attraction and repulsion. Both relate to the functions of the animal soul and its interaction with the humors and faculties. They are closely related to the behavioral and affective systems, especially with the desire to seek pleasure and the instinct to avoid harm.

The State of the Body

The human body may subsist in three possible states: health, disease, and a condition that is neither health nor disease, namely, convalescence or old age. The Prophet Muhammad said, ‘‘He who wakes up in the morning healthy in body and sound in soul and whose daily bread is assured, is as one that possesses the world.’’[31]

The Etiology of Disease

Islamic Medicine identifies six causes of disease: (1) air, (2) foods and drinks, (3) bodily movement, (4) emotional movement, (5) wakefulness and sleep, and (6) excretion and retention. Air is the essential element that keeps the body in equilibrium. Bad or polluted air disturbs the balance and equilibrium of the body. Hot food and drinks increase the heat of the bodily system; cold foods and drinks cool the bodily system. Movement increases

the warmth or heat of the body. The "movement" of the emotions sets the soul in motion and may cause an internal disequilibrium that is visible symptomatically, such as with outward signs of disease. Strong emotional states such as anger, fear, grief, or extreme joy may be dangerous to the equilibrium of the body. Sleep was thought to cause the soul to "bubble" within the body, while cooling the body from the outside. Wakefulness heats the body. Finally, a balance between excretion and retention processes is thought to protect the body. Excessive excretions such as diarrhea dehydrate the body and upset natural balances, whereas infrequent excretions may keep damaging or poisonous substances within the body rather than expelling them to the outside.

Symptoms of Disease

The practitioners of Islamic Medicine saw the symptoms of disease as external signs (*ʿalamat*) that provided evidence of internal states of imbalance or disequilibrium. Such signs could be "read" inductively, much as the world of signs (*ayat*) could be "read" to deduce the existence of God's presence behind it. An example of how such signs of disease were understood can be found in the Egyptian scholar Suyuti's book on the Medicine of the Prophet: "An excess of flesh is a sign of heat combined with moisture. Excess of fat is a sign of cold combined with moisture. In the same way, excessive desire for sleep is a sign of moisture, whereas a diminished desire for sleep is a sign of dryness. Similarly, the appearance of the organs [bulging through the skin] is a sign. Capacious organs are signs of heat, and the opposite is a sign of coldness. In the same way, dreams show temperaments. Seeing the colors yellow or red, or seeing flashes of light are all signs of heat. Their opposites are signs of coldness. Again, an excess of body odor is a sign of heat; the lack of it is a sign of cold."[32]

ISLAMIC MEDICINE: PRACTICE

Diagnosis

The diagnostic process in Islamic Medicine is dependent on observation and physical examination. The most common sign of illness is fever. According to the theory of Islamic Medicine, fever is a heat the body develops in order to compensate for a long-standing lack of heat within the body. A fever quickly hastens to refine the accumulated superfluous matters in the body by "ripening" them so that they can be eliminated. There are many types and kinds of fever, each requiring a different type of treatment.

To determine the relative harmony of the life force within the body, the *hakim* or physician evaluates the pulse. The pulse is a sign of the movement

of the blood in the heart and the arteries, which expand and contract. Every beat of the pulse consists of two movements and two pauses: expansion-pause and contraction-pause. The quality of expansion and contraction is measured according to the length, width, and depth of the artery carrying the blood. The physician examines the quality of the pulse, the duration of its cycle, the duration of its pauses, and variations in the quality of the expansion of the arteries. The physician also checks the compressibility of the artery, the moisture and temperature of the body when he takes the pulse, and its regularity: in other words, whether its rhythm is normal or disordered.

Pain is a sign of an imbalance in the body. Fifteen types of pain are identified in Islamic Medicine, each calling for a different treatment. In *The Canon of Medicine* (*al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*), Ibn Sina described the effects of pain on the body from the perspective of Islamic Medicine. The effects of pain include (1) dissipation of the faculties, (2) interference with the functions of the organs, and (3) the alternation of heat and cold in the affected organ. The coldness of the organ that comes about with the persistence of pain is due to the dispersion of vital forces and the decrease of innate heat.[33] Pain may be removed by a variety of substances: (1) *Resolvents* act in a way that is contrary to the cause of pain, thus removing the cause. Such resolvents may include anethum or linseed, which is made into a poultice and applied over the painful place. (2) *Narcotics* are agents that counteract the acrimony of the humors by soothing the body, inducing sleep, or dulling the sensitive faculties and lessening their activity. Narcotics used in Islamic Medicine include inebriants, milk, oil, and aqua dulcis. (3) *Analgesics* produce cold and thus increase the insensitivity of the affected organs. In addition, the body takes in nutrients, metabolizes them, and expels the wastes. Islamic Medicine stresses the importance of eliminants of the body and also uses them as a key in determining a diagnosis.[34]

Treatment

Diet and herbal remedies are emphasized in the treatment of illness in Islamic Medicine. Through diet, incorrect foods causing imbalances in bodily systems are eliminated; herbal remedies help restore balance of the body. The first step in treatment is to detoxify the body of any superfluous matters that have gathered in the body, causing obstruction to the natural flow of the humors. The physician does this by cleansing the stomach and bowels in order to restore the digestive process. Elimination processes are important for the restoration of health. The body takes in nutrients and metabolizes them, and the by-products must be carried away. Often, the urine was examined as a form of diagnosis. The quality of the urine was determined by color, transparency, and clearness, and also by the thickness, form, sediments, and residues that appear in the urine.

Ibn Sina developed a Formulary that was one of the most important handbooks of medicinal treatments in the Middle Ages. It contained special prescriptions and antidotes. It also discussed the forms they should take, such as pills, powders, syrups, decoctions, confections, or elixirs, and their method of preparation. It also contained thorough discourses about laxatives, purgative and nonpurgative powders, medicinal powders, dosages, potions and thickened juices, jams and preserves, pills, herbs and cereals, lotions, ointments, and dressings and prescriptions for the treatment of different diseases.[35]

ISLAMIC MEDICINE: MORAL HEALING

In Islamic Medicine, issues of morality are treated much like physical illnesses. Classical Islam did not have a simplistic notion of sin. Islamic morality and ethics made a distinction between occasional lapses of judgment or morality, which are designated by the Arabic term *dhanb,* and the willful breaking of moral rules, which is termed *ithm*. The moral consequences of an *ithm* are much greater than those of a *dhanb*. Furthermore, the Qur'an and Islamic traditions are quite clear that the person must take full responsibility for one's failings. It was very difficult in Classical Islam to avoid personal responsibility by saying, "The Devil made me do it." Chronic moral failings were treated as medical conditions, much like physical diseases. Just as physical diseases were caused by imbalances in the humors or in the working of the bodily systems, chronic moral problems were seen as psychic diseases that were caused by imbalances as well. According to the Shiite philosopher, scientist, and ethicist Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274 CE) the theory of the treatment of a moral malady is the same as the theory of the treatment of a physical malady: "It must be understood that the professional rule in treating imbalances is as follows: first, to know the classes of imbalances, then to recognize their causes and symptoms, and finally to proceed to restoration thereof. Moreover, imbalances are constitutional declinations from (a state of) equilibrium, while their treatment is the restoration of such constitutions to equilibrium by technical skill."[36]

Because moral diseases were seen as analogous to physical diseases, moral imbalances were treated by the same four categories of treatments as used in Islamic Medicine to heal physical ailments. One of Tusi's most famous works was a handbook on the ethics and treatment of moral maladies known as *The Nasirian Ethics*. According to this work, "General remedies in medicine are effected by the use of four categories of treatment: diet, medication, antidote, and cauterization or surgery. In psychical [*sic*] disorders, too, one must make use of the same system."[37] The first stage of treatment in Tusi's approach to Islamic Moral Medicine begins with the awareness of a moral

imbalance and the honest attempt by the afflicted person to own up to one's negative traits and behaviors:

> One should first clearly recognize the harm of the negative trait one seeks to change [i.e., gain cognitive consciousness of it]. There should be no doubt about it in order to have the necessary motivation to effect change. One should become aware though imagery of the harmful effects the negative trait has on the self, whether in one's faith or in one's worldly affairs. Then, at the next stage one should shun the learned negative trait by the use of will-power. If one's purpose is attained, well and good. If not, one must constantly concern oneself with the application of the positive trait corresponding to that negative one, going to great lengths to repeat, in the most excellent way and the fairest manner, the acts pertaining to that function. Such remedies, generally speaking, correspond to treatment by diet as practiced by physicians.[38]

Once one has become conscious of a moral malady, it is necessary to seek its cause. According to the teachings of Islamic Medicine, moral imbalances may be caused by improper diet, just as the imbalances that cause physical diseases may be caused by diet. On the other hand, moral imbalances might also be caused by factors that we today would call ''psychological.'' In such cases, the ''medication'' for the disease consists of techniques that are analogous in many ways to modern psychotherapy. Key to this process is to use certain positive tendencies and motivations within the bodily system to overcome other more destructive tendencies. This acts as a sort of antidote to the cause of the moral malady. Tusi explains:

> If, however, by this sort of imbalance [i.e., diet] the imbalance is not balanced, one must proceed to consciously chide and revile, to humiliate and reproach the self for the act in question, either in thought or by word or deed. If this does not produce the desired result and one's purpose is to adjust one of either the two functions—behavioral or affective/emotive, then one must effect this change by the use of the other function, for whenever one is dominant, the other is dominated. Moreover, just as the natural, created purpose of the affective/emotive function is to preserve alive the individual and the species, so the purpose of the behavioral function is to defeat the onslaught of ''attraction to pleasure.'' Thus, when they neutralize and compensate each other, the cognitive function has scope for distinction. This category of restoration to balance is analogous to the giving of medication by medical physicians.[39]

The use of an ''antidote'' in the treatment of a moral malady consists of restoring the balance of the moral system by applying remedies that act in opposition to the imbalance that created the moral malady in the first place. Thus, negative traits are countered by positive traits, hoping thereby that the interaction of these two traits will restore the psychological balance or mean. However, in moral treatment, as in all medical treatment, care must

be taken so that the patient does not "overdose" on the remedy. An excessive zeal to apply virtue may be just as dangerous in its own way as an excessive weakness for vice:

> If, again, the imbalance is not eliminated by [the previous] method, then, in order to eliminate it, one must seek help from the entrenched negative trait by consciously developing the opposite negative trait. However, one must always closely observe the condition of the self and notice any adjustment made in the condition. That is to say, when the [deeply entrenched] negative trait begins to decline [in terms of intensity] and approaches the mean, which is the place of the positive trait, the moral-seeker must abandon the course on which he has embarked in order not to incline from equilibrium to the other end of the continuum and thereby fall into another imbalance. This category of restoration to moral balance corresponds to the poisonous remedy to which the medical physician does not put his hand unless he is compelled to do so; and when he does, he recognizes the obligation to careful observation and monitoring the disorder so that there be no declination of the one disorder towards its opposite. "As for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and keeps the self from passion, then surely paradise—that is his abode." Prophetic traditions too command resisting the passions. The teaching of the Divine Law [does so] also. The Divine Law also enjoined the removal of negative traits from the self by good acts of the body. This constitutes the source of the specific form of opposition found in the ethics of [the Sunni theologian Abu Hamid] Ghazali, etc., that is, the removal of a negative trait by removing its causes and the removal of causes by means of their opposites.[40]

The fourth stage in the restoration of moral balance is similar to surgery, in that it involves the elimination or "cauterization" of the portion of the self that is diseased. This amounts to emergency treatment because it addresses a mortal threat to the moral life of the person: "If this type of restoration to moral balance [i.e., antidote], too, proves insufficient, the self constantly returning to the repetition of the [same] negative trait, then it must be consciously chastised and deadened. Difficult and arduous tasks must be imposed upon it to effect change. Furthermore, one should set about making vows and covenants that are difficult to implement after becoming aware of the negative effects upon the self. This category of restoration to moral balance is like the cutting-off of limbs in medicine or the cauterization of the extremities. The final remedy is surgery."[41]

The ultimate goal is the unity of the self: "The goal of self in practical philosophy is unity, which is achieved by the self when it completes the perfection of nature in its mode of operation in the self. As the self seeks balance, it learns to read the Signs of guidance through creation and guidance through revelation, on the way to completing the perfection of nature in its mode of operation. The stages are: becoming conscious of self; becoming centered in positive traits; benefiting another person; and practicing guiding

the development of positive traits and preventing the development of negative ones in other and in the self.''[42]

The Medicine of the Prophet and Islamic Medicine are branches of the tree of knowledge that grew in the Islamic world over a period of more than 1,400 years. Although its origins were in Greek approaches to medicine such as those of Hippocrates and Galen, Islamic Medicine eventually synthesized the theory and practice of Greek medicine and those of other civilizations such as India and China. Eventually, just as in other branches of science, Muslims came to excel in medicine and added their own important contributions to medical knowledge. This can be seen in the widespread influence of Ibn Sina's (Avicenna's) *The Canon of Medicine* throughout medieval Europe. Western theories of scientific medicine have now taken over most of the Islamic world, so much so, in fact, that doctors may even become the leaders of countries, such as former Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad of Malaysia. However, Islamic Medicine is still a living tradition in many areas of the Islamic world. One can find numerous practitioners and even clinics of Islamic Medicine in countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

NOTES

1. ''Scientific knowledge comes from the study of natural phenomena. These natural phenomena are the signs of God.'' See M.M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), vol. 1, 147.

2. See, for example, the following Qur'anic verses: 2:164,219; 3:190; 6:95–99; 10:3–6; 13:2–4; 17:12; 30:20–27; 45:3–6.

3. See Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy,* 146–147.

4. These are common traditions, and are known to virtually every Muslim. See, for example, the hadith in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi,* ''He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God.'' Abu 'Isa Muhammad al-Tirmidhi, *Jami' Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2000), 39:2.

5. Fazlur Rahman, *Health and Medicine in the Islamic Tradition* (Chicago, Illinois: ABC International Group, 1998), 38.

6. The consumption of alcohol is known to increase the incidence of several cancers and inflammatory conditions of the alimentary tract, cirrhosis of the liver, pancreatitis, heart muscle damage, and various disorders of the central and peripheral nervous systems. See Shahid Athar, *Islamic Perspectives in Medicine* (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publication, 1993), 118.

7. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Medicine of the Prophet,* trans. Penelope Johnstone (Cambridge, U.K.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1998), 4.

8. Ibid., 5.

9. Ibid., 17.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 10.

12. Ibid., 10–11.

13. Ibid., 11.

14. Ibid., 199.

15. Jalal al-Din ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr al-Suyuti, *Traditional Medicine of the Prophet,* trans. Cyril Elgood (Istanbul, Dar al-Fikr, 1999), 145.

16. Ibid., 146; see also, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, *On Listening to Music* (Chicago, Illinois: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2002).

17. For a discussion of ''pharmacognosy'' and a description of works on the subject, see Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: an Illustrated Study* (London: World of Islam Festival, 1976), 187–189.

18. See al-Tirmidhi, *Jamiʿ Sunan al-Tirmidhi,* ''Kitab al-Tibb,'' hadith no. 21.

19. For the history and development of hospitals in the Muslim world, see Nasr, *Islamic Science,* 154–156.

20. Nizami ʿArudi of Samarkand, *Chahar Maqala,* trans. E.G. Browne (London, U.K.: Luzac, 1921), 76.

21. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Chicago, Illinois: ABC International Group, 2001) 185.

22. Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim,* trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 2001), vol. 3, 1004 (no. 4462) and 1001 (no. 4454).

23. Quoted in Suyuti, *Traditional Medicine of the Prophet,* 103.

24. Ibid.

25. Islamic Medicine also formed the basis of medicine in the medieval Western world through the influence of Ibn Sina's (Avicenna's) *The Canon of Medicine* (al-Qanun fi al-Tibb), which was translated into Latin soon after its publication in Arabic. For 700 years, Ibn Sina's *Canon* was the most important textbook on medicine in Europe. It also formed the basis of the work of Samuel Hahnemann (d. 1897 CE), the founder of homeopathy.

26. See, for example, Sami K. Hamarneh, ''The Life Sciences,'' in *The Genius of Arab Civlization: Source of Renaissance,* ed. John R. Hayes, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 173–200.

27. See Vincent J. Cornell, ''Religion and Philosophy, '' in *World Eras Volume 2: The Rise and Spread of Islam 622–1500,* ed. Susan L. Douglass (Farmington Hills, Michigan: The Gale Group/Manly Inc., 2002), 324–399.

28. Suyuti, *Traditional Medicine of the Prophet,* 19.

29. On the medicine of souls and traditional ''psychotherapy'' in Islam, see Laleh Bakhtiar, *God's Will Be Done: Traditional Pyschoethics and the Personality Paradigm* (Chicago, Illinois: Institute of Traditional Psychology, 1994), volume 1 of the series *God's Will Be Done.*

30. ''To find the real center, which entails absolute moderation, is difficult to attain. To remain at this center and to preserve the balance is even more difficult.'' See Muhammad Mahdi ibn Abi Dharr Naraqi, *Jamiʿ al-saʿadat,* trans. Shahyar Saʿadat (Tehran: Foundation of Islamic Thought, 1989), 70. The Prophet Muhammad also said, ''*Sura Hud* has made an old man of me'' (*shaykh,* ''old man'' or ''wise person'') because of the verse, ''Tread the Straight Path as you have been commanded, as well

as those who are repentant with you, and do not transgress. Verily, [God] is the Seer of whatever you do" (11:112).

31. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi,* "Kitab al-Zuhd" (Book of Asceticism), 34.

32. Suyuti, *Traditional Medicine of the Prophet,* 22–23.

33. Avicenna, *The Canon of Medicine,* trans. O. Cameron Gruner and adapted by Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago, Illinois: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1999), 251.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 5.

36. Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Nassirian Ethics,* trans. G. Wickens (London, U.K.: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), 182. On the intellectual environment in which Tusi lived and worked, see "Conservation and Courtliness in the Intellectual Traditions, c. 1258–1503," in Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Volume 2: the Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 437–500.

37. Tusi, *Nassirian Ethics,* 175.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 182.

42. Ibid.

Index

Aag Ka Darya (Hyder), 129
'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, 131
'Abd al-Rahman 2nd (caliph), 78
'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun. *See* Ibn Khaldun
'Abd al-Rahman Jami, 133
'Abd al-Ra'uf Singkili, 125
Abdillatif Abdalla, 133
Abel, 12
Ablutions, 50
Abstract art, 7, 12, 30
Abu 'Ali ibn Sina, 62, 159. *See* Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali (Avicenna)
Abu Bakr (caliph), 53
Abu Bakr al-Razi. *See* Al-Razi, Muhammad ibn Abu Zakariyya
Abu al-Faraj, 131
Acculturation, modern European dress, 57–58
Acoustic considerations. *See* Auditory considerations
Adab al-Tabib (Ibn 'Ali al-Ruhawa), 160
Adam: divine form of, 32 n.4; naming task, 143–44
Adhan (call to prayer), 72
Adonis, 127, 150
Advice to Kings (al-Ghazali), 126
Affective system (Islamic medicine), 166, 168
Afrad, 115, 120 n.9
Ahl-i-Haqq ("People of the Truth"), 76–77, 86 n.31
Alcazar gardens (Cordoba), 102–3, 106
Alcohol drinking, 155, 174 n.6
Alexander, 8
Alf layla wa layla (*The Thousand and One Nights*), 23, 130
Alhambra, 2, 94, 101–2, 104, 106
'Ali ("Lion of God"), 75
Ali, Agha Shahid, 133
Ali, Ahmed, 128
'Ali Hujwiri, 61
Alkali, Zaynab, 128
Amdah nabawiyya (music in praise of Muhammad), 72–74
Amulets, 159
Andalusian music, 77–79
Angel Gabriel (*Pir-Binyanun*), 76, 123
Angels: naming of, 143–44; recitation of *Qur'an,* 47 n.13
Angkor Wat (Cambodia), 89
Aniconism, 5, 17 n.1, 18 n.21, 29–32, 32 n.3; influence on calligraphy, 33. *See also* Images
Animals: in Islamic art, 17 n.2; "poetry" of, 143, 148; responses to music, 63; souls of, 165–66; zoomorphic sculptures, 31
Anonymity of sacred art, 35–36, 39
'Antara ibn al-Shaddad, 93
Apparel. *See* Dress
Arabesques: in Arabic art, 23; in architecture, 11–12; as ornamentation in Qur'an, 43–44, 47 n.10
Arabic art: Arab-Islam connection, 19; contemplative nature of, 22

Arabic grammar, 127
Arabic language, 19–25, 122; archaic nature of, 20; auditive and imaginative intuition, 21; characteristics of, 21; compared to other languages, 24, 127; link to art, 22; phonetic system, 20, 21, 22, 26 nn.4, 7; poetry, 132, 133, 145; as sacred language of Islam, 19, 25–26 n.1; semantics, 21; sentence forms, 23–24; verbs, 21, 26 n.7
Arabic script, 15–16, 123
Archaic heritage: of Arabic language, 20; influence on Islamic art, 11
Archetype of Qur'an calligraphy, 36
Architecture, 6–7, 8–12, 13; Arabic, 24; concentric arrangements, 9; contemplative nature of, 2, 30; crystal shape, 6; distinction between public and private domains, 96; houses, 13–14; mausoleums and tombs, 54–55; *mihrab* (prayer niche), 16–17, 18 n.20, 51–53; symbolism in, 44
Art. *See* Islamic art
Auditory considerations: auditive intuition (phonetics), 21; listening to music, 60–62; prayer niches, 16–17, 18 n.20; spiritual audition (*al-sama'*), 64–66, 77. *See also* Music; Music genres
Authenticity, sacred art and, 34–35
Autobiographical works, 131
Averroës. *See* Ibn Rushd
Avicenna. *See* Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali (Avicenna)
Awlad haratina (Mahfouz), 127–28
Azadari (Shiite mourning period), 74
Azem Palace courtyards, 106
Azerbaijan, Kurdish music, 76–77

Babur, 131
Babur-Nameh, 131
Baghdad, Mongol invasion of, 46, 48 n.19, 78
Bahira, 129
Al-Bahr al-Madid (Ibn 'Ajiba), 126
Bahu, Sultan, 125
Ba-Kathir, 'Ali Ahmad, 128
Barazangi, Nimat, 126
Barlas, Asma, 126
Barzanji, Shaykh, 73
Beauty: as function of sacred art, 49–50; of gardens, 97–98; of music (*jamal*), 67
Bedouins: clothing of, 56. *See also* Nomadic people
Behavioral system (Islamic medicine), 166, 168
Bektashi Sufis, 68, 81
Benim Adim Kirmizi (Pamuk), 129
Berbers: music of, 83; writing of, 127. *See also* Nomadic people
Bible: commentaries on, 126; on four rivers, 101; water in, 120 n.3
Bidpai, 124
Bilgrami, Azad, 127, 131
Bilqis. *See* Sheba, Queen of
Bint al-Shati, 126
Biographical works, 130–31
The Blind Owl (Hedayat), 129
Blue, symbolism of, 44–46, 47 nn.14–15, 48 n.17
Body: covering of with dress, 14–15, 58; faculties and energies, 167–68; functions, 168; imbalances in, 156; organs, 165; positions of during prayer, 50–51; sacralization of, 50; washing for burial, 160–61
The Book (Sibawayhi), 127
*Book of Dede Korkut,*130
Book of Government (Nizam al-Mulk), 126
"Book of Kings" (*Shah-Nameh*), 75
Book of Songs (Isfahani), 71
Borges, Jorge Luis, 130
Botanical motifs, 1, 17 n.2; in arabesques, 11, 43. *See also* Trees
Bowing, 50–51
"Brethren of Purity." *See Ikhwan al-Safa'*
Buddhism: artistic style, 19–20; *tangkas,* 101; temple doorways, 89; throne, symbolism of, 53–54

Buf-e kur (Hedayat), 129
Burda ("Cloak"), poem of, 73, 124, 132
Burial places. *See* Mausoleums
Burial, preparing bodies for, 160–61
Bursevi, Ismail Hakki, 77, 126
Al-Busiri, Muhammad, 73, 124, 132
Byzantine influence: on Islamic art, 10; sacred images, 30–31

Cain, 12
Caliphs: ʻAbd al-Rahman II, 78; use of *minbar,* 53; al-Walid, 51
Calligraphy, 1, 3 n.2, 123; Arabic letters and script, 15–16; connection with revelation, 36; Qur'an calligraphy, 33–36; spiritual nature of, 15–16, 18 n.18, 34–36. *See also* Illumination
Call to prayer (*adhan*), 72
Camel drivers, songs of, 61
Camus, Albert, 129
Canonical prayer, 1–2
The Canon of Medicine (Ibn Sina), 125, 161, 174, 175 n.25
Carpets. *See* Rug making
The Catalogue (*al-Fihrist*), 122
Catholicism, Renaissance art and, 2
"Cave of the world," 51–52
Cemeteries. *See* Mausoleums
Chabutra (seating platform), 104
Chador ("shawl of water"), 104
Chahar-bagh (fourfold garden), 94–95
Chahar Maqala (Four Treatises), 160
Chanting: Kurdish music, 76; of *Qur'an,* 3 n.1, 43–44, 47 n.11, 49–50
Character. *See* Temperament
Charms, 159
Che Husna Azhari, 128
Children of the Alley (Mahfouz), 127–28
Chinese language, 24; calligraphy, 33; literature, 132
Chini-khana ("china cabinet"), 104
Chishti, Muʻin al-Din, 75, 82
Chishtiyya Sufis, 68, 75, 82
Chraïbi, Driss, 129
Christianity: artistic style, 20; church entrances, 89; here and hereafter beliefs, 2; liturgical vestments, 14; sacred art, 34, 49; throne, symbolism of, 53–54; typology of in prayer niches, 52–53
Christians, physicians, 159
Chugrai, Ismet, 129
Circles, symbolism of, 43, 44, 109 n.19
"Cities of the dead." *See* Mausoleums
Clarinet, 75, 83–84
Classical music, 71; Arabo-Andalusian music, 77–79; Hindustani music, 82–83; Iranian music, 79–81; spiritual audition, 77; Turkish music, 81–82
Clothing. *See* Dress
Cognition, 168
Colors, symbolism of: blue and gold, 44–46, 47 nn.14–15, 48 n.17; green, 44, 45, 48 n.17, 97, 108 n.11; red, 44, 48 n.18
Commentaries, Qur'anic, 125–27
The Complete Works of "Shams of Tabriz" (Rumi), 123
Conch shells. *See* Seashells, symbolism of
The Coral Rosary (Bilgrami), 127
Cordoba: Alcazar gardens, 102–3, 106; mosque at, 2
Courage, 166
Craft traditions, 12–13
Cresiphon, carpet of, 8
Crypts. *See* Mausoleums
Crystal shape: in architecture, 1, 6; symbolism of, 17–18 n.7
Cube: on mausoleums, 55; symbolism of, 101, 109 n.19. *See also* Kaʻba
Cupolas, 9, 10, 55
The Cure (Ibn Sina), 125
Cures. *See* Treatment of illness

Dammaj, Zayd Mutiʻ, 129
Dance, 63, 66, 67–68, 73–74, 83
Dastan-e Amir Hamza (Romance of Prince Hamza), 125

Davami, 80
Al-Daw' al-lami' (Sakhawi), 131
Debir (Holy of Holies), 52
Decadence, 47 n.13
Decoration. *See* Ornamentation
Deliverance from Error (al-Ghazali), 126
Dhu'l-Nun the Egyptian, 60–61
Diet, imbalances in, 170, 172
Disease, 162, 163, 169–70, 174 n.6. *See also* Medicine and healing
The Dissimulation of the Devil (Ibn al-Jawzi), 61
Divan-e Shams-e Tabriz (Rumi), 123
Divine Names, 35, 40
Divine Unity. *See Tawhid*
Djebar, Assïa, 130
Doctors. *See Hakim;* Medicine and healing
Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat as-Sakhrah*), 51
Domes, symbolism of, 13, 44
Doorways: to houses, 96; symbolic motifs, 89–90
Dress: feminine, 15, 27, 57; as Islamic art, 14–15, 27–28; liturgical role of, 14–15, 55–56; masculine, 14–15, 18 n.15, 27–28, 56, 57; modern European dress, 57–58; Qur'an on, 50; "sacred vestment" (*ihram*), 15; turbans, 15, 18 n.16, 27–28, 56
Drugs and medicines, 158–59, 170–71
Drums, 67, 75, 78, 82, 83–84
Duality, principle of, 112
Duino Elegies (Rilke), 144
Duncan, Robert, 150

The Earthquake (Wattar), 127–28
Eating. *See* Foods
Eckhart, Meister, 90
Ecstasy (*wajd; wujud*), 66
Effeminates (*mukhannathun*), 68
Egyptian literature, 77, 126, 128, 131. *See also* Al-Busiri, Muhammad; Suyuti
Energy, sources of, 168
English language, poetry in, 133
Entrances, symbolic motifs, 89–90
Epic of Gilgamesh, 95
"Epistle on Music" (*Ikhwan al-Safa'*), 59–60, 62, 63, 64, 77
Ethics. *See* Moral healing
Ethics of the Physician (Ibn 'Ali al-Ruhawa), 160
Euclid, 60
Exedra of Roman basilicas, 52
The Expansive Sea (Ibn 'Ajiba), 126

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. *See* Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din
Falasifa (philosophers), on music, 62–64
Al-Farabi, Abu Nast, 62, 71
Farah, Nuruddin, 128
Farhat, Jermanus, 127
Farrokhzad, Forough, 133
Farsi: poetry in, 146; script, 123
Fasting, 155, 156
Ferdowsi, 124
Fever, 169
Fiction literature, 127–29
Figurative art. *See* Images
Al-Fihrist (The Catalogue), 122
Flood, 114–15
Flute, reed (*nay*), 68, 71, 78, 81–82
Foods: as cause of illness, 170, 172; prohibited, 155
Forty, symbolism of, 115, 120 n.8
Fountains: in *chahar-bagh* (garden), 94, 103–4; importance of in *Qur'an,* 98; symbolism of, 89, 90, 100, 113
Four elements, 101; in Islamic medicine, 158, 161–62, 164
Four, symbolism of, 44, 100–102
Four Treatises (*Chahar Maqala*), 160
French Surrealists, 145, 148
Friezes, inscriptions on, 16
Fulfulde poetry, 133
Funerary buildings. *See* Mausoleums
Al-Fusul wa al-ghayat (Ma'arri), 126–27

Gardens of Paradise: symbolism of, 89, 100, 105; terminology, 95, 108 nn.5–6

Garden of the Martyrs (Kashifi), 74
Gardens, 93–107; *chahar-bagh* (four-fold garden), 94–95, 100–103; entrances to, 89–90; geometric lay-out of, 104; number four, symbolism of, 100–102; peaceful function of, 104–5; pre-Islamic, 93–94; Qur'anic symbolism of, 100, 107; terminology, 95, 97–98, 108 nn.5–6; tradition of, 107; water and fountains, 94, 103–4 (*See also* Fountains)
Garments. *See* Dress
Gender roles. *See* Men; Women
Generalife (Granada), 94, 102, 104, 106
Genesis: four rivers, 101; water in, 120 n.3
Geometric shapes: in gardens, 101, 104; in Islamic art, 1, 9; symbolism of, 1, 9, 10, 11, 44
Ghalib, 133
Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid: autobiography, 126, 131; on moral healing, 173; philosophical writing of, 125–26, 132; on practice of medicine, 154; spiritual audition, 64–65, 65–66; on stringed instruments, 68; water, symbolism of, 111
Ghazali, Ahmad, 67–68, 85 n.7
Gibran, Kahlil, 133
Gnosis, 111, 113, 120 n.2
God: anthropomorphic symbols of, 29, 30; Divine Names, 35, 40; maternal nature of, 45, 47 n.14; *Qur'an* on nature of, 40, 41
Gold (color), symbolism of, 44–46
Gold, wearing of, 56, 99, 109 n.15
Gothic art, 20
Graves. *See* Mausoleums
Great Book on Music (al-Farabi), 62
Great Ta'iyya (poem), 77
Greek medicine, 154, 161, 174
Greek Orthodox Church, sacred images, 30–31
Greek philosophers, 60, 124
Green, symbolism of, 44, 45, 48 n.17, 97, 108 n.11
Greeting, Muslim, 105
Griha (song), 83
Guardian symbols at doorways, 89–90
Gurnah, Abdulrazak, 128

Hadiqa (walled garden), 93–94
Hadith: collectors and transmitters of writings, 130; on turbans, 28
Haeri, Fadhlalla, 126
Hafiz, 77
Hagia Sophia, 10, 52
Hajj (pilgrimage), 15
Hakim (physician-philosophers), 159–61. *See also* Medicine and healing
Al-Hakim, Tawfiq, 128
Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, 125
Han Kitab, 132
Harmonium, 75
Haroun and the Sea of Stories (Rushdie), 128
Al-Harraq, Muhammad, 79
Harriqiyya, 79
Hassan ibn Thabit, 124, 127
Hausa poetry, 133
Al-Hayy, 'Abd, 131
Head coverings: hats, 15; High Priest of the Old Testament, 14, 18 n.11; turbans, 15, 18 n.16, 27–28, 56
Head, shaving, 156
Healing: moral healing, 157, 171–74. *See also* Medicine and healing
Health and wellbeing. *See* Medicine and healing
Hebrew, poetry in, 132
Hedayat, Sadegh, 129
Heer Ranjha (Waris Shah), 125
Heraldry, costumes and, 14, 18 n.14
Herbs, medicinal, 158–59, 170–71
"Hidden book," 36, 44
Hikayat Hang Tuah (*Tale of Hang Tuah*), 130
Hikma (wisdom), 6, 39, 166
Hinduism: architecture, 10; feminine dress, 27; iconography, 58 n.2; nudity, 18 n.13; polytheism, 32 n.1. *See also* India

Hindustani music, 82–83; national song, 126
Holy of Holies (*debir*), 52
Holy Virgin. *See* Mary
The Hostage (Dammaj), 129
Houses: courtyard gardens, 95–96; physical arrangement of, 13–14, 96–97
Hudud al-'Alam (*Limits of the World*), 131
Hukama' (philosophers), 62–64
Humayun (mausoleum), 102
Humors (Islamic medicine), 164–65
Hunting parks, 95. *See also* Gardens
Hyder, Qurratulain, 129

Ibn Abi al-Dunya, 61
Ibn 'Ajiba, Ahmad, 66, 86 n.19, 126
Ibn Ajurum, 127
Ibn 'Ali al-Ruhawa, Ishaq, 160
Ibn 'Arabi, 123
Ibn Bajja, 62
Ibn al-Habib, Muhammad, 149
Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad (imam), 161
Ibn Hisham, 131
Ibn Idris al-Shafi'i, Muhammad, 123
Ibn Ishaq, Hunayn, 124, 131
Ibn al-Jawzi, 61–62
Ibn Kathir, 125
Ibn Khaldun, 56, 57, 131
Ibn Khurdadhbih, 63
Ibn Malik (imam), 56, 127
Ibn al-Muqaffa', 124–25
Ibn al-Nadim, 122
Ibn Qutayba Abbasid, 158
Ibn Rushd (Averroës), 126, 159
Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali (Avicenna): autobiography, 131; on effects of pain, 170; Formulary, 171; on gravity, 162; influence of on medicine, 174, 175 n.25; on medicine, 161, 164; as philosopher, 62, 125, 159
Ibn Zayla, 63
Ice, symbolism of, 112, 120 n.7
Iconoclasm, 5, 17 n.1, 18 n.21, 29–30, 32 n.3; influence on calligraphy, 33
Iconography. *See* Images
Idol worship: idolatrous polytheism, 32 n.1; prohibition of images and, 29
Ihya' 'ulum al-din (al-Ghazali), 64–65, 65–66, 126
Ikhwan al-Safa',59–60, 62, 63, 64, 77
Illness. *See* Disease
Illumination, 39–46; background ornamentation, 43–44; colors, 44–46; connection with revelation, 36, 40, 43; functions of, 44, 46–47 n.4; marginal ornamentation, 39–40, 41–44; *Sura* headings, 39, 40, 41–42. *See also* Calligraphy
Images, 29–32; arabesques (*See* Arabesques); botanical motifs, 1, 11, 17 n.2, 43; geometric shapes, 1, 9, 10; ornamentation, 30; portraiture, avoidance of, 23, 29; prohibition of, 5, 17 n.1, 18 n.21, 29–30, 32 n.3
Imaginative intuition (semantics), 21
Imam(s): Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad, 161; Ibn Malik, 56, 127; use of *minbar,* 53
Imru'l-Qays, 124
Incantations, 159
The Incoherence of the "Incoherence" (Ibn Rushd), 126
The Incoherence of the Philosophers (al-Ghazali), 125–26
India: Hindustani music, 82–83; literature of, 125, 129; mausoleum gardens, 102; Persian language, 127; *Qawwali* music, 75–76, 82. *See also* Hinduism
Indonesian poetry, 133
Initiatic path (*al-tariqa*), 65
Interlacements, 12, 23
Iqbal, Muhammad, 126
Iran: Iranian music, 79–81; Kurdish music, 76–77; martial training (*zurkhaneh*), 75; Shiite Islam music, 74–75. *See also* Persian culture
Iraq, Kurdish music, 76–77
Isfahani, 71
Ishaq al-Mawsili, 63, 78, 85 n.12
Islahi, Amin Ahsan, 126

Islam: contrasted with other religions, 40; forms of worship, 49; music controversy, 59–62
Islam (submission), 56; Arabic root, 105; water and, 111
Islamic art, 1–17; abstract nature of, 7, 12, 30; Arab-Islam connection, 19; architecture, 6–7, 8–12, 13; calligraphy, 1, 3 n.2, 15–16; clothing, 14–15; craft traditions, 12–13; Divine Unity, 5–6, 13, 25; general characteristics of, 1–3, 9–10; images (*See* Images); link to *Qur'an,* 106; nomadic influence, 7–8; objectivity of, 6–7; ornamentation, 30; rug making, 7–8; spiritual nature of, 3, 5–6, 12–13
Islamic gardens. *See* Gardens
Islamic halls of prayer, 8–9
Islamic literature, 121–33; biographies, 130–31; commentaries, 125–27; fiction, 127–29; grammar books, 127; maqamat, 129–30; poetry, 132–33; Qur'an as, 122–23; Qur'anic quotes and themes in, 127–28; terminology, 121, 134 n.4; translations, 124, 134 n.5
Islamic medicine. *See* Medicine and healing
"Islamic sciences," 125
Islam, Syed Manzurul, 129
Ismail (*dede*), 81
Ismail Hakki. *See* Bursevi, Ismail Hakki
Itri, 73

Jahjuka, Morocco, 83–84
Jalal (majesty), 67
Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli, 125
Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, 125
Jamal (Beauty), 67. *See also* Beauty
Jami, 77
Jami'al-bayan 'an ta 'wil ay al-Qur'an (Tabari), 125
Al-Jawiziyya, Ibn Qayyim, 156
Jesus, images of, 31
Jewelry. *See* Gold, wearing of
Jews, physicians, 159
Al-jihad al-akbar ("the greatest holy war"), 55
Joshua, 115
Judaic art, 1
Jurists. *See also Ulama*
Jurists, on music, 61

Ka'ba, 9, 17 n.5, 89, 101, 109 n.18
Ka'b, ibn Zuhayr, 124
Kalila wa Dimna (Bidpai), 124
Kamal (perfection), 40
Kamanja (violin), 75, 78, 82
Kane, Cheikh Hamidou, 129
Kanz-ul-iman (Khan), 126
Kar (Pamuk), 129
Kashf al-asrar (Ruzbihan Baqli), 131
Kashf al-mahjub ('Ali Hujwiri), 61
Kashifi, Husayn Wa'iz, 74
Kazakhstan, 90
Keys to the Qur'an (Haeri), 126
Keys to the Unseen (Fakhr al-Din al-Razi), 125
Khalid al-Azhari, 35
Khalwati Sufis, 81
Khamriyya (wine poem), 77
Khan, Sir Sayyid Ahmad, 126
Khayyam, Omar, 126
Al-Khidr, 115–16, 129
Khusraw, Amir, 75, 82
Kiarostami, Abbas, 146
Al-Kindi, Ya'qub, 62, 68, 78
Al-Kitab (Sibawayhi), 127
Kitab al-Aghani (Abu al-Faraj), 131
Kitab al-aghani (Isfahani), 71
Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir (al-Farabi), 62
Knowledge: degrees of, 153–54; scientific, 174 n.1; without wisdom, 166–67
Kurdish culture: music, 76–77; poetry, 133
Kyrgyzstan, 90

Ladder. *See Minbar*
Language: language, 24
Legal sources, 123
Leyli va Majnun (Nizami), 125

L'homme du livre (Chraïbi), 129
Life, water as symbolic of, 114, 120 n.6
The Lifting of the Veil ('Ali Hujwiri), 61
Lions, as guardian symbols, 89
Listening to music, 60–62, 64–66, 158. *See also* Auditory considerations; Music
Litanies of the 99 Divine Names, 35
Literature. *See* Islamic literature
Liturgical and devotional music: call to prayer (*adhan*), 72; Kurdish, 76–77; music in praise of Muhammad (*amdah nabawiyya*), 72–74; *Qawwalis* of India, 75–76; Shiite Islam, 74–75
Loin de Médine (Djebar), 130
Lute (*'ud*), 68, 78, 79, 82

Maalouf, Amin, 126
Ma'arri, 126–27
Madrasa (school of higher education), 160
Mafatih al-ghayb (Fakhr al-Din al-Razi), 125
Maghrib: architecture, 10, 44; art styles, 2; dress of, 27, 56
Mahfouz, Naguib, 127–28
Majesty (*jalal*), 67
Malay, literature of, 128, 130, 133
Malhun (music), 83
Mamluk tombs (Cairo), 55
Al-Ma'mun (caliph), 124
Mandolin (*tanbur*), 68, 76, 82
"The Mantle Ode." *See Burda* ("Cloak"), poem of
Maqam (melodic modes), 69–70, 77
Maqamat ("Assemblies"), 129–30
Martial training (*zurkhaneh*), 75
Martyrs, tombs of, 54–55
Mary, 31, 47 nn.15–16, 52, 58 n.3
Masjid (mosque): absence of images in, 5; architecture, 8, 10–12, 13; meaning of, 50
Masnavi/Mathnawi (Rumi), 80, 90, 123, 147
Mausoleums, 54–55; architecture, 8, 9; gardens, 94, 102
Mawludiyya ("Birthday Song"), 73
Mawsim al-hijra ila al-shamal (Salih), 128
Mecca, 17 n.1. *See also* Ka'ba
Meccan Revelations (Muhyi-'d-Din Ibnal-'Arabi), 31
Medicine and healing: body, state of, 168; constitution of the patient, 161–68; diagnosis, 169–70; disease, 162, 163, 168–69, 174 n.6; knowledge as basis for, 153–54; Medicine of the Prophet, 154–59, 174; moral healing, 157, 171–74; physician-philosopher (*hakim*), 159–61; treatment methods, 156–59, 170–71
Medicine of the Prophet (al-Jawziyya), 156
Melodic modes (*maqam*), 69–70, 77
Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin (Ruete), 131
Men, clothing of, 14–15, 18 n.1527–28, 56, 57
Menara Garden, 94, 103
Mercy: link with water, 111, 119–20 n.1. *See also* Al-Rahim; Al-Rahman
Mevlevi Sufis ("Whirling Dervishes), 68, 73–74, 81
Mihrab (prayer niche), 16–17, 18 n.20, 51–53
Minbar (pulpit), 53–54
Miniature paintings (Persian), 3 n.3, 31, 34, 37 n.3
Mir Taqi Mir, 133
Mishkat (niche), 52
Mishkat al-Anwar (al-Ghazali), 111
Modes, melodic (*mazam*), 69–70, 77
Mongols, invasion of Baghdad, 46, 48 n.19, 78
Monotheism, 40–41
Monuments, funerary, 55. *See also* Mausoleums
Moors, music of, 83
Moral healing, 157, 171–74
Morocco: Menara Garden, 94, 103; music of, 79, 83–84
Moses, 112, 115–16

Mosque (*masjid*). *See Masjid*
Mother-of-pearl, symbolism of, 13, 18 n.20, 52
"Mother of the Book," 45, 111, 112
Muezzin, call to prayer (*adhan*), 72
Muhammad: ascent to Heaven (*mi'raj*), 13; biographies of, 131; clothing of, 56, 57; as Divine Masterpiece, 34; on four rivers, 101; on health, 168; on Imru'l-Qays, 124; on incantation, 159; incompatibility of art and worship, 50; instruction to chant Qur'an, 49; on *jihad* (struggle), 105; on knowledge, 154; on medicine, 157; medicine of the Prophet, 154–59; *minbar,* use of, 53; music in praise of (*amdah nabawiyya*), 72–74; music, views of, 70–71; on pen and tablet symbols, 42; as the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*), 73; on poetry, 150; poetry and, 123–24; rejection of figurative art, 31, 32 n.2; revelatory inspiration of, 122–23, 147; Solomon, allegory of, 117–18; temperament of, 163–64; tomb of, 55; on tombs, 54; on turbans, 27–28; on *Umma,* 57; as the Unlettered Prophet, 33, 36 n.2
Muhammad V, 102
Al-Muhit (the "All-Embracing"), 45
Muhit (ocean), 45, 112
Muhyi-'d-Din Ibnal-'Arabi, 31
Mu'jam al-buldan (Yaqut), 131
Mu'jam al-udaba' (Yaqut), 131
Mukhannathun (effeminates), 68
Munif, Abdel Rahman, 129
Al-Munqidh min al-dalal (al-Ghazali), 126
Music: controversy of, 59–62, 158; early philosophers on, 62–64; effects of, 63–64, 64–66; healing properties of, 158; instruments, 67–68; melodic modes (*maqam*), 69–70, 77; rhythm (*usul*), 70; Sufi views of, 60–61, 64–66
Music genres: classical music, 71, 77–83; liturgical and devotional music, 71, 72–77; popular music, 71–72, 83–84; types of, 71–72
Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English (Malak), 128
Mysticism: and music, 62, 73, 75–76, 80, 83; sacred art and, 36; spiritual audition (*al-sama'*), 64–66, 77. *See also* Sufism

Naat i-Sherif ("Noble Praise-Song"), 73–74
Names: Divine Names, 35, 40; naming task of Adam, 143–44
Nasihat al-muluk (al-Ghazali), 126
Nasir al-Din Tusi, 171–72
The Nasirian Ethics (Nasir al-Din Tusi), 171–72
Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, 70, 160
Nature: *Qur'an* on, 154; relationships with, 153, 155; sacred art as, 41
Nawba (musical suite), 78, 79
Nay (reed flute), 68, 71, 78, 81–82
The Niche of Lights (al-Ghazali), 111
Nichomus, 60
Nine, symbolism of, 44, 68
Nizam al-Mulk, 126
Nizami, 125
Noah, 114–15
Nomadic people, 26 n.2; clothing of, 56; influence on Islamic art, 7–8, 21; role in conserving Arabic language, 20–21
Novels, 127–29
Nudity, 18 n.13
Numbers: forty, 115, 120 n.8; four, 44, 100–102; musical proportion, 63; nine, 44, 68; three, 44
Nuzhat al-khawatir (al-Hayy), 131

Objectivity, of Islamic art, 6–7
Ocean (*muhit*), 45, 112
Old age, 157, 168
Olive trees, 47 n.9
Orchards. *See* Gardens
The Organization of the Qur'an (Islahi), 126
Organs, bodily, 165

Ornamentation, 43–44; illumination in the *Qur'an,* 39–46, 47 n.6; in Islamic art, 30; sun symbols, 43, 47 n.8; tree symbols, 41–42, 43, 47 nn.5–6, 9, 89

Page, Russell, 102
The Pages of Day and Night (Adonis), 150
Pain, 166, 170
Palmette (*shujayra*), 41–42, 43, 47 nn.5–6, 9, 89
Pamuk, Orhan, 129
Pandore (*tanbur*), 68, 76, 82
Panjabi poetry, 133
Paradise (*janna*): concept of as basis for gardens, 95, 108 n.5; Gardens of Paradise, symbolism of, 89, 105, 107
Paragraphs and Periods (Ma'arri), 126–27
Pashto poetry, 133
Patient, constitution of, 161–68. *See also* Medicine and healing
Peace, of gardens, 104–5
Pearl, symbolism of, 13, 18 n.20, 52
Pen (*qalam*) and tablet (*lawhin*) symbols, 42–43
"People of the Truth" (*Ahl-i-Haqq*), 76–77, 86 n.31
Perfect Man, doctrine of (*al-insan al-kamil*), 73
Persian culture: art, 24, 31; chivalry, 75; gardens and hunting parks, 95; language and literature, 123, 124, 127, 146; miniatures, 3 n.3, 31, 34, 37 n.3; music, 70, 79–81; poetry, 132–33. *See also* Iran
Pharmaceuticals, 158–59, 170–71
Pharmacognosy, 159
Phonetic system: alphabets and, 26 n.4; Arabic language, 20, 21, 22, 26 nn.4, 7
Physician-philosophers (*hakim*), 159–61. *See also* Medicine and healing
Pilgrims, songs of, 61
Plants: botanical motifs, 1, 11, 17 n.2, 43; medicinal, 158–59; scented, 103
Poetry, 132–33; *Burda,* poem of, 73; distinguished from divine revelation, 147, 150; *griha* and *malhun,* 83; nature and purpose of, 143–50; *Qawwali* songs, 76; quatrains, 78; *Qur'an* as, 123; Shiite Islam, 74; Sufi works, 77, 132, 148, 149, 150. *See also* Chanting; Music
Popular music, 83–84
Portraiture: rejection of, 23. *See also* Images
Prayer niche. *See Mihrab*
Prayer rugs, 18 n.19
Pre-Islamic period: gardens, 93–94; music, 70, 83
Princes, mausoleums of, 55
Proportion, in music, 63
Prostration: indicating in Qur'an, 40; *masjid* and, 50; during prayer, 50–51
Protection: as function of sacred art, 50; from harm, 156
Psalmody of sacred texts, 1, 64
Psychology: identification with clothing, 57; moral healing, 171–74; two souls concept, 165–67
Ptolemy, 60
Pulpit (*minbar*). *See Minbar*
Pulse (Islamic medicine), 169–70
Pyramidal shapes, symbolism of, 44
Pythagoras, 60

Qanun (zither), 68, 75, 78, 82
Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb (Ibn Sina), 161, 174, 175 n.25
Qasida Poetry in Islam Asia and Africa (Sperl), 132–33
Qasidat al-Burda ("The Mantle Ode"), 124
Qawwalis of India, 75–76
Qibla: facing during prayer, 50; indications of in prayer niche, 51
Quatrains, 127
Qubbat as-Sakhrah (Dome of the Rock), 51
Qur'an: Adam's naming task, 143–44; anthropomorphic symbolism of God, 29, 30; artistic style of, 24–25;

chanting, 3 n.1, 43–44, 47 n.11, 49–50; colors of illumination, 44–46; commentaries on, 125–27, 126; on deaths of saints, 54–55; on degrees of knowledge, 153–54; Divine Unity in, 25; effect on poetry, 150; on four rivers, 101; function of, 123; Gardens of Paradise (*jannat al-firdaws*), 95, 97–99; on gnosis, 113; on good health, 155; on healing, 155; "hidden book," 36, 44; influence of, 123; language of, 24; as literary work, 123; on liturgical garments, 50; meeting place of the two seas, 115–16; Moses' request for water, 112; Muhammad as Divine Masterpiece, 34; on nature, 154; "niche of light" (*mishkat*), 16, 18 n.19, 52; ornamental symbols, 41–44; pen (*qalam*) and tablet (*lawhin*) symbols, 42–43; on perfection (*kamal*), 40; quoting of and use of themes in other literature, 127–28; on Signs (*ayat*), 153; silence of on music, 59; Solomon and Queen of Sheba, 116–19; *Sura* headings and organization, 41–42, 123; symbolic gardens in, 100, 107; on tombs, 54; ubiquity of, 24; Verse of Darkness, 115; water, symbolism of, 97, 98, 111–19
Qur'anic calligraphy. *See* Calligraphy
Qur'anic illumination. *See* Illumination
Qur'anic recitation, 60, 156, 158

Rabab (rebec), 68, 78, 79
Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, 132
Al-Rahim ("All-Merciful"), 45–46, 100
Rahim (womb), 45
Al-Rahina (Dammaj), 129
Al-Rahman ("Infinitely Good"), 45–46, 100
Al-Rahman, 'Aisha 'Abd, 126
Rain. *See* Water and rain
Rational soul, 166
Rawda (garden), 74, 103, 109 n.21
Rayed sun symbol, 43, 47 n.8
Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din, 125
Al-Razi, Muhammad ibn Abu Zakariyya (Rhazes), 62, 159
The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (Iqbal), 126
Rectangles, symbolism of, 44
Red, symbolism of, 44, 48 n.18
Reed flute (*nay*), 68, 71, 78, 81–82
Remedies. *See* Treatment of illness
Renaissance art, 2
Revelation (*tanzil*): calligraphy and illumination, connection with, 36, 40, 42, 43; descent of, 42–43; link with water, 111; poetry distinguished from, 147, 150; types of, 155
The Revival of the Sciences of Religion (al-Ghazali), 64–65, 65–66, 126
Rhazes. *See* Al-Razi, Muhammad ibn Abu Zakariyya
Rhythm (*usul*), 70
Rilke, Rainer Maria, 144
Risala (Treatise; ibn Idris al-Shafi'i), 123
Risalat al-ghufran (Bint al-Shati), 126
River of Fire (Hyder), 129
Rivers, four, 101
Riyad (walled garden), 103
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 103
Roman basilicas, exedra of, 52
Romance literature, 125
*Romance of Prince Hamza,*125
Rug making, 7–8
Ruh al-bayan (Bursevi), 126
Rumi, Mevlana Jalaluddin: on guardians of doorways, 90; on music, 80, 83; *Naat i-Sherif* ("Noble Praise-Song"), 73–74; poetry of, 77, 132, 147; works of, 123
Ruqya (*Qur'an* recitation for healing), 158
Rushdie, Salman, 128
Rustam, 75
Ruzbihan Baqli, 79–80, 131

Sacred art, 49–58; characteristics and

functions of, 34–36, 41, 49–51; as criterion of authenticity, 34–35; gardens as, 99; *mihrab* (prayer niche), 16–17, 18 n.20, 51–53; nature as, 41; symbolism in, 41–46; *vs.* religious art, 34; wisdom of, 39. *See also* Calligraphy; Illumination
Sacred dramas (*taz'iyas*), 74
Safi al-Din, 62
Saint (*wali*). *See Wali*
Sakhawi, 131
Salat (prayer): body positions during, 50–51; clothing suitable for, 56; effect of mosque architecture on, 10–11
Salih, Tayeb, 128
Salim Chishti (Fatehpur), 55
Salme, Sayyide, 131
Salt water, symbolism of, 112, 115
Sama' (spiritual concert), 65
Al-sama' (spiritual audition), 64–66, 77
Samarcande (Maalouf), 126
Sanskrit literature, 124
The Satanic Verses (Rushdie), 128
Sayyadatna Maryan (Our Lady Mary). *See* Mary
Scales. *See* Melodic modes
Scents: healing power of, 158; scented plants, 103
Scum of water, symbolism of, 113, 117
Seas: symbolism of two seas, 112, 113–14, 115–16, 118. *See also* Ocean
Seashells, symbolism of, 18 n.20, 52
Season of Migration to the North (Salih), 128
Selimiye mosque (Edima), 10
Semantics, Arabic language, 21
Sentence forms, Arabic language, 23–24
Seth, 12, 120 n.8
Seventh Ecumenical Council (Byzantine Church), 30–31
Seyyid Abdallah bin Nasir, 133
Shadhilis-Harraqi Sufis, 68
Shah-i-Zindah ("The Living King"), 55
Shah-Nameh ("Book of Kings"), 75
Shah, Waris, 125
Shalimor Bagh (Lahore), 104
Shamsah ("little sun"), 43, 47 n.8
Shari'a, observance of, 65
Sheba, Queen of, 116–19
Al-Shifa' (Ibn Sina), 125
Shiite Islam: devotional music, 74–75; Kurdish music, 76–77; role of Muhammad, 74
Shujayra (palmette;" little tree"), 41–42, 43, 47 nn.5–6, 9, 89
Sibawahyi, 127
Sickness. *See* Disease
"Simple," 158–59
Sinan, 10, 102
Sindhi poetry, 133
Singing. *See* Vocal music
Sirat Rasul Allah (Ibn Ishaq), 131
Siyasat Nameh (Nizam al-Mulk), 126
Sky, 45
S-L-M (root), 105
Solar roundels. *See* Sun symbols
Solomon, 39, 116–19
Soul(s) (*nafs*): in Islamic medicine, 165–67; water as symbolic of, 103–4
The Soul of Eloquence (Bursevi), 126
Speech: Divine Word, 16–17; influence on calligraphy, 33; phonetic system, 20, 21, 22, 26 nn.4, 7; spiritual importance of, 16–17. *See also* Chanting
Spiraloid designs, 11
Spiritual audition (*al-sama'*), 64–66, 77
Spiritual concert (*sama'*), 65
Springs, symbolism of, 113
Square, symbolism of, 44
Steps. *See Minbar*
Stringed instruments, 68, 75, 78. *See also* Lute; Mandolin; Violin
Subhat al-Marjan (Bilgrami), 127
Submission (*islam*), 56
Sufism: literary works, 132; music, 60–61, 73–74, 77, 79, 81–82; poetry, 77, 132, 148, 149, 150; role of

Muhammad, 74; spiritual audition (*al-sama'*), 64–66, 77
Sultan Bahu, 125
The Sum of Clarity Concerning the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'an, 125
*Sunna,*72–73; on dress, 55–56; on music, 59
Sunni Islam, prohibition of images, 29–30
Sun symbols (*shamsah*), 43, 47 n.8
Sura (s), 123; illumination of headings, 39, 40, 41–42; on nature of God, 40, 41
Surat al-Qalam (Qur'an 68), 42
Surat al-Rahman ("The All-Merciful"), 45–46, 100
Surat Yusuf (Qur'an 12, "Joseph"), 125
Surrealists, 145, 148
Suyuti, 131, 160–61
Swahili, poetry, 133
Symbolism. *See* Colors, symbolism of; Images; Numbers; *specific symbols*

Tabari, 125, 130
Tablet (*lawhin*) symbol, 42–43
Tadabbur-i Qur'an (Islahi), 126
*Tafsir al-Jalalayn,*125
Tahafut al-falasifa (al-Ghazali), 125–26
Tahafut al-tahafut (Ibn Rushd), 126
Taj Mahal, 102
Talbis Iblis (Ibn al-Jawzi), 61
Talismans, 159
Tambourine, 67, 79
Tanbur (pandore; mandolin), 68, 76, 82
Al-tariqa (initiatic path), 65
Tawajud (affectation of ecstasy), 66
Tawhid (Divine Unity; oneness of God), 1, 153; in the Byzantine Church, 31; in garden design, 105–6; in Islamic art, 5–6, 13, 25; in Qur'an, 25; reflection of in architecture, 13
Tayfur, Ibn Abi Tahir, 130
Taz'iyas (sacred dramas), 74–75
Temperament (Islamic medicine), 163–64
Tetouan, Morocco, 79
Theophany, 1
The Thousand and One Nights (*Alf layla wa layla*), 130
Three, symbolism of, 44
Thresholds, symbolic motifs, 89–90
Throne: of *minbar,* 53–54; of Sheba, 116–19; symbolism of, 13
Tombs, 8, 9, 54–55
Translations of literary works, 134 n.5
The Treasure of Faith (Khan), 126
Treatment of illness, 156–59, 170–71
Trees: olive tree, 47 n.9; palmettes, 41–42, 43, 47 nn.5–6, 9, 89; "tree of life," 42, 89, 90
Triangles, symbolism of, 44, 89
Turbans, 15, 18 n.16, 27–28, 56
Turkish culture: art, 24; Kurdish music, 76–77; language, 24; mosques, 11; music, 73–74, 81–82; poetry, 132, 133

'Ud (lute), 68, 78, 79, 82
Ulama (scholars), on music, 59–62
'Umar (caliph), 53
'Umar ibn al-Farid, 77
'Umar ibn Sa'id, 127
Upright position during prayer, 50–51
Urdu poetry, 133
Usul (rhythm), 70

Vassanji, M.G., 128
Verbs, Arabic language, 21, 26 n.7
Verse of Darkness, 115
Verses, separation of with illuminated ornaments, 40, 43
Violin, 75, 78, 82
Virgin Mary. *See* Mary
Vocal music, 67–68, 70–71, 86 n.25; of Greek philosphers, 60

Wadud, Amina, 126
Wajd (ecstasy), 66
Wali (saint): tombs of, 54–55

Al-Walid (caliph), 51
Wali songs, 133
Water and rain: in *chahar-bagh* (garden), 94, 103–4; Qur'an on, 97, 98; symbolism of, 89, 90, 100, 103–4, 111–19
Wattar, Tahir, 127–28
Waves, symbolism of, 114, 120 n.7
Weaving, symbolism of in calligraphy, 16
Whirling dance, 67–68
White pearl. *See* Pearl, symbolism of
Wijdan (ecstatic meting), 66
Wine, symbolic relationship to water, 113
Wisdom (*hikma*), 6, 39, 166
Womb (*rahim*). *See Rahim*
Women: clothing of, 15, 27, 57; Islamic medicine and, 160; literary works by, 126, 128, 129, 130
Worship: incompatibility with art, 50; Islamic forms, 49
Writing(s): Arabic script, 15–16. *See also* Calligraphy; Islamic literature
Wujud (ecstasy), 66

Yaqut, 131
Yunus Emre, 77
Yurts, 89–90
Yusuf, 125

Zamaklhshari, 125
Zam Zam, 89
Al-Zilsal (Wattar), 127–28
Ziryab, 78
Zither (*qanun*), 68, 75, 78, 82
Zoomorphic art. *See* Animals
Zoroastrians, 159
Zulaykha, 125
Zurkhaneh (centers of martial training), 75

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Voices of Islam

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Contents

Voices of Islam — vii
Vincent J. Cornell

Introduction: Islamic Modernism and the Challenge of Reform — xvii
Omid Safi

1. Creativity, Innovation, and Heresy in Islam — 1
Umar F. Abd-Allah

2. Is "Islamic" Philosophy Islamic? — 23
Mohammad Azadpur

3. Islam for the People: Muslim Men's Voices on Race and Ethnicity in the American Umma — 43
Jamillah A. Karim

4. Islam in the African American Experience — 69
Aminah Beverly McCloud

5. Islam and Gender Justice — 85
Ziba Mir-Hosseini

6. Transitions in the "Progress" of Civilization: Theorizing History, Practice, and Tradition — 115
Ebrahim Moosa

7. Sexual Diversity in Islam — 131
Scott Sirajul Haqq Kugle

8. Sufism in the West: Islam in an Interspiritual Age — 169
Hugh Talat Halman

9. I and Thou in a Fluid World: Beyond "Islam versus the West" — 199
Omid Safi

Index 223

About the Editors and Contributors 235

VOICES OF ISLAM

Vincent J. Cornell

It has long been a truism to say that Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world. However, the situation expressed by this statement is more than a little ironic because Islam is also one of the most studied religions in the world, after Christianity and Judaism. In the quarter of a century since the 1978–1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, hundreds of books on Islam and the Islamic world have appeared in print, including more than a score of introductions to Islam in various European languages. How is one to understand this paradox? Why is it that most Americans and Europeans are still largely uninformed about Islam after so many books about Islam have been published? Even more, how can people still claim to know so little about Islam when Muslims now live in virtually every medium-sized and major community in America and Europe? A visit to a local library or to a national bookstore chain in any American city will reveal numerous titles on Islam and the Muslim world, ranging from journalistic potboilers to academic studies, translations of the Qur'an, and works advocating a variety of points of view from apologetics to predictions of the apocalypse.

The answer to this question is complex, and it would take a book itself to discuss it adequately. More than 28 years have passed since Edward Said wrote his classic study *Orientalism,* and it has been nearly as long since Said critiqued journalistic depictions of Islam in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. When these books first appeared in print, many thought that the ignorance about the Middle East and the Muslim world in the West would finally be dispelled. However, there is little evidence that the public consciousness of Islam and Muslims has been raised to a significant degree in Western countries. Scholars of Islam in American universities still feel the need to humanize Muslims in the eyes of their students. A basic objective of many introductory courses on Islam is to demonstrate that Muslims are rational human beings and that their beliefs are worthy of respect. As Carl W. Ernst observes in the preface to his recent work, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the*

Contemporary World, "It still amazes me that intelligent people can believe that all Muslims are violent or that all Muslim women are oppressed, when they would never dream of uttering slurs stereotyping much smaller groups such as Jews or blacks. The strength of these negative images of Muslims is remarkable, even though they are not based on personal experience or actual study, but they receive daily reinforcement from the news media and popular culture."[1]

Such prejudices and misconceptions have only become worse since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. There still remains a need to portray Muslims in all of their human diversity, whether this diversity is based on culture, historical circumstances, economic class, gender, or religious doctrine. Today, Muslims represent nearly one-fourth of the world's population. Although many Americans are aware that Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, most are surprised to learn that half of the Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan. In this sense, Islam is as much an "Asian" religion as is Hinduism or Buddhism. The new reality of global Islam strongly contradicts the "Middle Eastern" view of Islam held by most Americans. Politically, the United States has been preoccupied with the Middle East for more than half a century. Religiously, however, American Protestantism has been involved in the Middle East for more than 150 years. Thus, it comes as a shock for Americans to learn that only one-fourth of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa and that only one-fifth of Muslims are Arabs. Islam is now as much a worldwide religion as Christianity, with somewhere between 4 and 6 million believers in the United States and approximately 10 million believers in Western Europe. Almost 20 million Muslims live within the borders of the Russian Federation, and nearly a million people of Muslim descent live in the Russian city of St. Petersburg, on the Gulf of Finland.

To think of Islam as monolithic under these circumstances is both wrong and dangerous. The idea that all Muslims are fundamentalists or anti-democratic religious zealots can lead to the fear that dangerous aliens are hiding within Western countries, a fifth column of a civilization that is antithetical to freedom and the liberal way of life. This attitude is often expressed in popular opinion in both the United States and Europe. For example, it can be seen in the "Letters" section of the June 7, 2004, edition of *Time* magazine, where a reader writes: "Now it is time for Muslim clerics to denounce the terrorists or admit that Islam is fighting a war with us—a religious war."[2] For the author of this letter, Muslim "clerics" are not to be trusted, not because they find it hard to believe that pious Muslims would commit outrageous acts of terrorism, but because they secretly hate the West and its values. Clearly, for this reader of *Time,* Islam and the West are at war; however the "West" may be defined and wherever "Islam" or Muslims are to be found.

Prejudice against Muslim minorities still exists in many countries. In Russia, Muslim restaurateurs from the Caucasus Mountains must call themselves "Georgian" to stay in business. In China, being Muslim by ethnicity is acceptable, but being a Muslim by conviction might get one convicted for antistate activities. In the Balkans, Muslims in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia are called "Turks" and right-wing nationalist parties deny them full ethnic legitimacy as citizens of their countries. In India, over a thousand Muslims were killed in communal riots in Gujarat as recently as 2002. As I write these words, Israel and Hizbollah, the Lebanese Shiite political movement and militia, are engaged in a bloody conflict that has left hundreds of dead and injured on both sides. Although the number of people who have been killed in Lebanon, most of whom are Shiite civilians, is far greater than the number of those killed in Israel, television news reports in the United States do not treat Lebanese and Israeli casualties the same way. While the casualties that are caused by Hizbollah rockets in Israel are depicted as personal tragedies, Lebanese casualties are seldom personalized in this way. The truth is, of course, that all casualties of war are personal tragedies, whether the victims are Lebanese civilians, Israeli civilians, or American soldiers killed or maimed by improvised explosive devices in Iraq. In addition, all civilian deaths in war pose a moral problem, whether they are caused as a consequence of aggression or of retaliation. In many ways, depersonalization can have worse effects than actual hatred. An enemy that is hated must at least be confronted; when innocent victims are reduced to pictures without stories, they are all too easily ignored.

The problem of depersonalization has deeper roots than just individual prejudice. Ironically, the global village created by international news organizations such as CNN, BBC, and Fox News may unintentionally contribute to the problem of devaluing Muslim lives. Depictions of victimhood are often studies in incomprehension: victims speak a language the viewer cannot understand, their shock or rage strips them of their rationality, and their standard of living and mode of dress may appear medieval or even primitive when compared with the dominant cultural forms of modernity. In her classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt pointed out that the ideology of human equality, which is fostered with all good intentions by the international news media, paradoxically contributes to the visibility of difference by confusing equality with sameness. In 99 out of 100 cases, says Arendt, equality "will be mistaken for an innate quality of every individual, who is 'normal' if he is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he happens to be different. This perversion of equality from a political into a social concept is all the more dangerous when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the more conspicuous."[3] According to Arendt, the widespread acceptance of the ideal of social equality after the French Revolution was a major reason why genocide,

whether of Jews in Europe, Tutsis in Rwanda, or Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, has become a characteristically modern phenomenon.

The idea of equality as sameness was not as firmly established in the United States, claimed Arendt, because the "equal opportunity" ideology of American liberalism values difference—in the form of imagination, entrepreneurship, and personal initiative—as a token of success.[4] This ideology enabled Jews in America to assert their distinctiveness and eventually to prosper in the twentieth century, and it provides an opportunity for Muslim Americans to assert their distinctiveness and to prosper today. So far, the United States has not engaged in systematic persecution of Muslims and has been relatively free of anti-Muslim prejudice. However, fear and distrust of Muslims among the general public is fostered by images of insurgent attacks and suicide bombings in Iraq, of Al Qaeda atrocities around the globe, and of increasing expressions of anti-Americanism in the Arabic and Islamic media. In addition, some pundits on talk radio, certain fundamentalist religious leaders, and some members of the conservative press and academia fan the flames of prejudice by portraying Islam as inherently intolerant and by portraying Muslims as slaves to tradition and authoritarianism rather than as advocates of reason and freedom of expression. Clearly, there is still a need to demonstrate to the American public that Muslims are rational human beings and that Islam is a religion that is worthy of respect.

Changing public opinion about Islam and Muslims in the United States and Europe will not be easy. The culture critic Guillermo Gomez-Peña has written that as a result of the opening of American borders to non-Europeans in the 1960s, the American myth of the cultural melting pot "has been replaced by a model that is more germane to the times, that of the *menudo chowder*. According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float."[5] At the present time, Muslims constitute the most visible "stubborn chunks" in the *menudo chowder* of American and European pluralism. Muslims are often seen as the chunks of the *menudo chowder* that most stubbornly refuse to "melt in." To the non-Muslim majoritarian citizen of Western countries, Muslims seem to be the most "uncivil" members of civil society. They do not dress like the majority, they do not eat like the majority, they do not drink like the majority, they do not let their women work, they reject the music and cultural values of the majority, and sometimes they even try to opt out of majoritarian legal and economic systems. In Europe, Islam has replaced Catholicism as the religion that left-wing pundits most love to hate. Americans, however, have been more ambivalent about Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, there have been sincere attempts to include Muslims as full partners in civil society. On the other hand, the apparent resistance of some Muslims to "fit in" creates a widespread distrust that has had legal ramifications in several notable cases.

A useful way to conceive of the problem that Muslims face as members of civil society—both within Western countries and in the global civil society that is dominated by the West—is to recognize, following Homi K. Bhabha, the social fact of Muslim *unhomeliness*. To be "unhomed," says Bhabha, is not to be homeless, but rather to escape easy assimilation or accommodation.[6] The problem is not that the "unhomed" possesses no physical home but that there is no "place" to locate the unhomed in the majoritarian consciousness. Simply put, one does not know what to make of the unhomed. Bhabha derives this term from Sigmund Freud's concept of *unheimlich,* "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."[7] Unhomeliness is a way of expressing social discomfort. When one encounters the unhomed, one feels awkward and uncomfortable because the unhomed person appears truly alien. Indeed, if there is any single experience that virtually all Muslims in Western countries share, it is that Islam makes non-Muslims uncomfortable. In the global civil society dominated by the West, Muslims are unhomed wherever they may live, even in their own countries.

This reality of Muslim experience highlights how contemporary advocates of Muslim identity politics have often made matters worse by accentuating symbolic tokens of difference between so-called Islamic and Western norms. The problem for Islam in today's global civil society is not that it is not seen. On the contrary, Islam and Muslims are arguably all too visible because they are seen as fundamentally different from the accepted norm. Like the black man in the colonial West Indies or in Jim Crow America, the Muslim is, to borrow a phrase from Frantz Fanon, "overdetermined from without."[8] Muslims have been overdetermined by the press, overdetermined by Hollywood, overdetermined by politicians, and overdetermined by culture critics. From the president of the United States to the prime minister of the United Kingdom, and in countless editorials in print and television media, leaders of public opinion ask, "What do Muslims want?" Such a question forces the Muslim into a corner in which the only answer is apologetics or defiance. To again paraphrase Fanon, the overdetermined Muslim is constantly made aware of himself or herself not just in the third person but in *triple person*. As a symbol of the unhomely, the Muslim is made to feel personally responsible for a contradictory variety of "Islamic" moral values, "Islamic" cultural expressions, and "Islamic" religious and political doctrines.[9]

In the face of such outside pressures, what the overdetermined Muslim needs most is not to be seen, but to be heard. There is a critical need for Islam to be expressed to the world not as an image, but as a narrative, and for Muslims to bear their own witness to their own experiences. The vast majority of books on Islam written in European languages, even the best ones, have been written by non-Muslims. This is not necessarily a problem, because an objective and open-minded non-Muslim can often describe Islam for a non-

Muslim audience better than a Muslim apologist. The scholars Said and Ernst, mentioned above, are both from Christian backgrounds. The discipline of Religious Studies from which Ernst writes has been careful to maintain a nonjudgmental attitude toward non-Christian religions. As heirs to the political and philosophical values of European liberalism, scholars of Religious Studies are typically dogmatic about only one thing: they must practice *epoché* (a Greek word meaning "holding back" or restraining one's beliefs) when approaching the worldview of another religion. In the words of the late Canadian scholar of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, it is not enough to act like "a fly crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl," magisterially observing another's religious practices while remaining distant from the subject. Instead, one must be more engaged in her inquiry and, through imagination and the use of *epoché,* try to find out what it feels like to be a goldfish.[10]

Through the practice of *epoché,* the field of Religious Studies has by now produced two generations of accomplished scholars of Islam in the United States and Canada. Smith himself was a fair and sympathetic Christian scholar of Islam, and his field has been more influential than any other in promoting the study of Islam in the West. However, even Smith was aware that only a goldfish truly knows what it means to be a goldfish. The most that a sympathetic non-Muslim specialist in Islamic studies can do is *describe* Islam from the perspective of a sensitive outsider. Because non-Muslims do not share a personal commitment to the Islamic faith, they are not in the best position to convey a sense of what it means to *be* a Muslim on the inside—to live a Muslim life, to share Muslim values and concerns, and to experience Islam spiritually. In the final analysis, only Muslims can fully bear witness to their own traditions from within.

The five-volume set of *Voices of Islam* is an attempt to meet this need. By bringing together the voices of nearly 50 prominent Muslims from around the world, it aims to present an accurate, comprehensive, and accessible account of Islamic doctrines, practices, and worldviews for a general reader at the senior high school and university undergraduate level. The subjects of the volumes—*Voices of Tradition; Voices of the Spirit; Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society; Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science;* and *Voices of Change*—were selected to provide as wide a depiction as possible of Muslim experiences and ways of knowledge. Taken collectively, the chapters in these volumes provide bridges between formal religion and culture, the present and the past, tradition and change, and spiritual and outward action that can be crossed by readers, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims, many times and in a variety of ways. What this set does *not* do is present a magisterial, authoritative vision of an "objectively real" Islam that is juxtaposed against a supposedly inauthentic diversity of individual voices. As the Egyptian-American legal scholar and culture critic Khaled Abou El Fadl has pointed out, whenever Islam is the subject of discourse, the authoritative quickly elides into the authoritarian, irrespective of whether the voice of authority is

Muslim or non-Muslim.[11] The editors of *Voices of Islam* seek to avoid the authoritarian by allowing every voice expressed in the five-volume set to be authoritative, both in terms of individual experience and in terms of the commonalities that Muslims share among themselves.

THE EDITORS

The general editor for *Voices of Islam* is Vincent J. Cornell, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. When he was solicited by Praeger, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing, to formulate this project, he was director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Cornell has been a Sunni Muslim for more than 30 years and is a noted scholar of Islamic thought and history. His most important book, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (1998), was described by a prepublication reviewer as ‘‘the most significant study of the Sufi tradition in Islam to have appeared in the last two decades.’’ Besides publishing works on Sufism, Dr. Cornell has also written articles on Islamic law, Islamic theology, and moral and political philosophy. For the past five years, he has been a participant in the Archbishop of Canterbury’s ‘‘Building Bridges’’ dialogue of Christian and Muslim theologians. In cooperation with the Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute, he is presently co-convener of a group of Muslim scholars, of whom some are contributors to *Voices of Islam,* which is working toward a new theology of the religious other in Islam. Besides serving as general editor for *Voices of Islam,* Dr. Cornell is also the volume editor for Volume 1, *Voices of Tradition;* Volume 2, *Voices of the Spirit;* and Volume 4, *Voices of Art, Beauty, and Science.*

The associate editors for *Voices of Islam* are Omid Safi and Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore. Omid Safi is Associate Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Safi, the grandson of a noted Iranian Ayatollah, was born in the United States but raised in Iran and has been recognized as an important Muslim voice for moderation and diversity. He gained widespread praise for his edited first book, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003), and was interviewed on CNN, National Public Radio, and other major media outlets. He recently published an important study of Sufi-state relations in premodern Iran, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006). Dr. Safi is the volume editor for Volume 5, *Voices of Change,* which contains chapters by many of the authors represented in his earlier work, *Progressive Muslims.*

Virginia Gray Henry-Blakemore has been a practicing Sunni Muslim for almost 40 years. She is director of the interfaith publishing houses Fons Vitae and Quinta Essentia and cofounder and trustee of the Islamic Texts Society of Cambridge, England. Some of the most influential families in Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have supported her publishing projects. She is an accomplished lecturer in art history, world religions, and filmmaking and is a founding member of the Thomas Merton Center Foundation. Henry-Blakemore received her BA at Sarah Lawrence College, studied at the American University in Cairo and Al-Azhar University, earned her MA in Education at the University of Michigan, and served as a research fellow at Cambridge University from 1983 to 1990. She is the volume editor for Volume 3, *Voices of Life: Family, Home, and Society.*

THE AUTHORS

As stated earlier, *Voices of Islam* seeks to meet the need for Muslims to bear witness to their own traditions by bringing together a diverse collection of Muslim voices from different regions and from different scholarly and professional backgrounds. The voices that speak to the readers about Islam in this set come from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America, and include men and women, academics, community and religious leaders, teachers, activists, and business leaders. Some authors were born Muslims and others embraced Islam at various points in their lives. A variety of doctrinal, legal, and cultural positions are also represented, including modernists, traditionalists, legalists, Sunnis, Shiites, Sufis, and "progressive Muslims." The editors of the set took care to represent as many Muslim points of view as possible, including those that they may disagree with. Although each chapter in the set was designed to provide basic information for the general reader on a particular topic, the authors were encouraged to express their individual voices of opinion and experience whenever possible.

In theoretical terms, *Voices of Islam* treads a fine line between what Paul Veyne has called "specificity" and "singularity." As both an introduction to Islam and as an expression of Islamic diversity, this set combines historical and commentarial approaches, as well as poetic and narrative accounts of individual experiences. Because of the wide range of subjects that are covered, individualized accounts (the "singular") make up much of the narrative of *Voices of Islam,* but the intent of the work is not to express individuality per se. Rather, the goal is to help the reader understand the varieties of Islamic experience (the "specific") more deeply by finding within their specificity a certain kind of generality.[12]

For Veyne, "specificity" is another way of expressing typicality or the ideal type, a sociological concept that has been a useful tool for investigating complex systems of social organization, thought, or belief. However, the problem with typification is that it may lead to oversimplification, and oversimplification is the handmaiden of the stereotype. Typification can lead to oversimplification because the concept of typicality belongs to a structure of general knowledge that obscures the view of the singular and the different. Thus,

presenting the voices of only preselected ''typical Muslims'' or ''representative Muslims'' in a work such as *Voices of Islam* would only aggravate the tendency of many Muslims and non-Muslims to define Islam in a single, essentialized way. When done from without, this can lead to a form of stereotyping that may exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the tendency to see Muslims in ways that they do not see themselves. When done from within, it can lead to a dogmatic fundamentalism (whether liberal or conservative does not matter) that excludes the voices of difference from ''real'' Islam and fosters a totalitarian approach to religion. Such an emphasis on the legitimacy of representation by Muslims themselves would merely reinforce the ideal of sameness that Arendt decried and enable the overdetermination of the ''typical'' Muslim from without. For this reason, *Voices of Islam* seeks to strike a balance between specificity and singularity. Not only the chapters in these volumes but also the backgrounds and personal orientations of their authors express Islam as a lived diversity and as a source of multiple wellsprings of knowledge. Through the use of individual voices, this work seeks to save the ''singular'' from the ''typical'' by employing the ''specific.''

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a major figure in the field of Subaltern Studies, notes: ''Singularity is a matter of viewing. It comes into being as that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category.''[13] For Chakrabarty, the singular is a necessary antidote to the typical because it ''defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination.''[14] Because the tendency to overdetermine and objectify Islam is central to the continued lack of understanding of Islam by non-Muslims, it is necessary to defy the generalizing impulse by demonstrating that the unity of Islam is not a unity of sameness, but of diversity. Highlighting the singularity of individual Islamic practices and doctrines becomes a means of liberating Islam from the totalizing vision of both religious fundamentalism (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) and secular essentialism. While Islam in theory may be a unity, in both thought and practice this ''unity'' is in reality a galaxy whose millions of singular stars exist within a universe of multiple perspectives. This is not just a sociological fact, but a theological point as well. For centuries, Muslim theologians have asserted that the Transcendent Unity of God is a mystery that defies the normal rules of logic. To human beings, unity usually implies either singularity or sameness, but with respect to God, Unity is beyond number or comparison.

In historiographical terms, a work that seeks to describe Islam through the voices of individual Muslims is an example of ''minority history.'' However, by allowing the voices of specificity and singularity to enter into a trialogue that includes each other as well as the reader, *Voices of Islam* is also an example of ''subaltern history.'' For Chakrabarty, subaltern narratives ''are marginalized not because of any conscious intentions but because they represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional

history."[15] Subaltern narratives do not only belong to socially subordinate or minority groups, but they also belong to underrepresented groups in Western scholarship, even if these groups comprise a billion people as Muslims do. Subaltern narratives resist typification because the realities that they represent do not correspond to the stereotypical. As such, they need to be studied on their own terms. The history of Islam in thought and practice is the product of constant dialogues between the present and the past, internal and external discourses, culture and ideology, and tradition and change. To describe Islam as anything less would be to reduce it to a limited set of descriptive and conceptual categories that can only rob Islam of its diversity and its historical and intellectual depth. The best way to retain a sense of this diversity and depth is to allow Muslim voices to relate their own narratives of Islam's past and present.

NOTES

1. Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), xvii.
2. *Time,* June 7, 2004, 10.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* rev. ed. (San Diego, New York, and London: Harvest Harcourt, 1976), 54.
4. Ibid., 55.
5. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The New World (B)order," *Third Text* 21 (Winter 1992–1993): 74, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 313.
6. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 13.
7. Ibid., 14–15.
8. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, U.K.: Pluto, 1986), 116. The original French term for this condition is *surdéterminé*. See idem, *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 128.
9. Ibid., 112.
10. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7.
11. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 9–85.
12. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology,* trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 56.
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 82.
14. Ibid., 83.
15. Ibid., 101.

Introduction: Islamic Modernism and the Challenge of Reform

Omid Safi

As is the case with a number of other Islamic discourses, it can be hard to locate the precise boundary of Islamic modernism. Few Muslims explicitly self-identify as "Muslim modernists," instead referring to themselves simply as Muslims, Muslims involved in the process of reform and renewal, Muslims committed to democracy, or even Muslims intent on reviving the original spirit of Islam, and so on. In this chapter, Islamic modernism is defined as those discourses of Islamic thought and practice in the last two centuries in which modernity itself is seen as a viable category to be engaged and drawn upon, not merely dismissed or used as a foil to define oneself against. In other words, advocates of Islamic modernism are not simply modern Muslims, but those Muslims who see something (if not all) of modernity as a constitutive element of their worldview and practice.

As is the case with other intellectual and religious traditions, Islamic engagements with modernity have been neither static nor uniform. Traditions ranging from the revivalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the rationalizing and Salafi tendencies of the early twentieth century and liberal movements of the twentieth century to the progressive Muslim movement of the twenty-first century can all be discussed under the broad rubric of Islamic modernism. At times, it has been difficult to locate the boundary between Islamic modernists and some nineteenth and early twentieth-century Salafi thinkers. While both advocated fresh interpretations of the Qur'an, the modernists tended to engage modernity explicitly, while many Salafis couched their language in terms of the "righteous forefathers" (*al-salaf al-salih*), the generation of Muslims living with and immediately after the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. As the Salafi movement became more intertwined with Wahhabism in the latter half of the twentieth century, the overlap between modernists and Salafis has been greatly reduced.

The discourse of modernity itself has not stayed static, as it has come under severe critique and contestation from feminists, environmentalists, Marxists, subalterns, and others. As the discourse of modernity continues to change, so does the Muslims' engagement with modernity.

There has also been a long-running tendency among Western journalists and even some scholars to look at the more conservative articulations of Islam (such as some traditional religious scholars) and even Muslim extremists as somehow representing "real" Islam. Subsequently, these same sources have not adequately engaged Muslim modernists, who are unfairly dismissed as lacking a constituency or influence. Even more problematic is the view that any explicit reimagination of Islam is no longer proper Islam. Lord Cromer, the British High Commissioner in colonized Egypt, once said: "Islam reformed is Islam no longer." That attitude misses out on the vigorous and dynamic debates that are going on within not only modernist circles but also much wider segments of Muslim societies.

WESTERNIZATION AND ISLAMIC PARADIGMS

Part of the difficulty in establishing the proper boundaries of Islamic modernism has to do with the way that the legacy of Islamic thought in the modern era is conceived. Many Western scholars have seen modernity as the exclusive offspring of the West. As a result, they approach any other civilization that engages modernity through the lens of "westernization." There is no doubt that the encounter with Western institutions and thought has had a profound impact on Islamic modernism both positively (emphasis on human rights, constitutional forms of government, adoption of science, and so on) and negatively (colonialism, support for autocratic regimes). At the same time, many of the issues that Islamic modernism engages in today, such as human rights, democracy, and gender equality, are truly seen as universal struggles. Furthermore, most Muslims who engage in these issues frame their own discourse not as a borrowing or "influence" from Western discourses but rather as a part of indigenous Islamic interpretations. Positioning the Muslims' struggles in these universal arenas as perpetually derivative vis-à-vis Western paradigms robs them of their own legitimacy and dynamism.

The above debate is also related to the question of when one begins the history of Islamic modernism. The older paradigm that viewed Islamic thought as being hopelessly stagnated before being jolted into a renaissance by its interaction with European colonialism is now critiqued by many scholars. Without diminishing the profound experience of responding to the shock, inspiration, and violation of the colonial experience, it is also important to realize that some of Islamic modernism also taps into important reform traditions such as those of Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (d. 1762 CE) and many others that predate the full-blown experience of colonialism.

Many Muslim modernists have readily acknowledged their interactions with Western models, institutions, and figures. At the same time, they have been careful to cast their movement in decidedly Islamic terms. Perhaps the most common strategy for presenting modernism as an indigenously and authentically Islamic movement is through the framework of *ijtihad*. Ijtihad initially had a narrower meaning, referring to the process whereby Muslim jurists would arrive at rulings for unprecedented cases. Modernists have gradually expanded the definition of ijtihad to mean critical, independent reasoning in all domains of thought. In other words, the proper domain of ijtihad was taken to be not just Islamic law, but rather all aspects of thought. In an egalitarian move, modernists often hold that it is not just jurists but all Muslims who have the responsibility to carry on ijtihad. The majority of Islamic modernist writers emphasize the need for ijtihad, often juxtaposing it polemically against *taqlid*. As with ijtihad, modernists often came to reinterpret taqlid. Taqlid had originally meant simply following a school of Islamic law, or a designated authority (*marja'*) in the case of Shi'i Muslims. For modernists, who wished to highlight independent critical reasoning, taqlid came to mean blind imitationism, becoming a symbol of everything they held to be wrong with Islamic thought.

Like many other Muslims, modernists have also cast their own struggles as perpetuating the spirit of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Modernists often insist that the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an in areas ranging from women's rights to religious pluralism should take precedence over more conservative later rulings. The distinction between essence and manifestation (universals and particulars, or other similar dichotomies) is a common motif in the history of modern religious thought. Many modernists also argue for a situated and contextualized reading of the Qur'anic revelations.

Modernists find Qur'anic precedence for their own critique of tradition-embedded injustices by pointing to Qur'anic voices (such as Abraham and Muhammad) who challenged their own communities that insisted on continuing "the ways of the forefathers." In appealing to prophetic legitimization, many modernists have recorded the conversation between the Prophet Muhammad and a companion named Mu'adh ibn Jabal (d. 627 CE). Mu'adh stated that if he found no explicit guidance in the Qur'an or the Prophetic Sunna, he would rely upon his own independent reasoning. While the systematic nature of this anecdote may well belie a later juridical desire to legitimize legal methodology, it has served as a powerful tool for modernists to sanctify their own appeal to ijtihad.

Modernists also tapped into other traditions of Islamic legitimacy that predated the encounter with Europe. One of their most powerful means of legitimizing themselves was by adopting the title of "renewer" (*mujaddid*), which recalls a statement attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "God sends to this nation at the beginning of every century someone who renews its

religion.''In doing so, modernists lay claim to the mantle of Islamic renewal, following established masters such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) whose *Ihya ʿulum al-din* (''Revivification of the Religious Sciences'') explicitly evoked the theme of rejuvenation and renewal after death and stagnation.

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

The crisis of contemporary Islam is inseparable from the struggle over defining Islam and the concomitant question of who gets to define Islam, using what sources and which methodologies. The question of authority in Islam is today—and always has been—a contested one. It has often been noted that there is no formal church structure in Islam, thus making the basis of religious authority more fluid. However, the lack of a formal structure of authority does not mean that there is *no* religious authority in Islam. Competing groups of Muslims claim authority for themselves by appealing to religious language and symbols. Foremost among them have been the religious scholars (*ulama*) and the mystics (Sufis) of Islam. However, Sufism is a contested category today, and many in the Muslim community who gravitate toward Salafism view Sufis with skepticism. For example, the mainstream Muslim organizations in the United States (ISNA [Islamic Society of North America], ICNA [Islamic Circle of North America], and so on) avoid almost all mention of Sufism (and also Shiʿism). Ismailis, particularly those under the leadership of the Agha Khan, are arguably the most cosmopolitan and modernity-accommodating of Muslims, yet they too are seen by some conservative Sunni Muslims as suspect.

The majority of Muslims turn to the *ulama,* religious scholars, for religious guidance. However, many ulama today are ill equipped to handle the more sophisticated aspects of modernity. Traditional *madrasa* institutions in many Muslim-majority countries no longer offer the highest level of critical thought. Whereas these institutions historically attracted the brightest minds in the community, today they are often a haven for those who have been unable to be admitted to more lucrative medicine, engineering, and computer science programs. By and large, there are very few madrasas for the training of ulama in a curriculum that takes modernity in the sense of engagements with modern philosophy, sciences, politics, and economics seriously. Ironically, while it is modernist Muslims who are often best suited to handle these decidedly modern subjects, many community members view modernist scholars with skepticism because modernists are not usually products of the *madrasa* system. This skepticism of the community members reveals a great deal about the presuppositions of many contemporary Muslims regarding the ''purity'' of Islamic knowledge, and how it may be ''contaminated'' by Western training. Ironically, this compartmentalized view of knowledge contradicts both medieval philosophical notions and certain contemporary

rigorous interpretations of Islam. As early as the ninth century CE, the philosopher al-Kindi stated: "We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth and to assimilate it from whatever source it comes to us, even if it is brought to us by former generations and foreign peoples."[1] This epistemological pluralism is also echoed in the works of the Iranian modernist intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush, who states: "I believe that truths everywhere are compatible; no truth clashes with any other truth.... Thus, in my search for the truth, I became oblivious to whether an idea originated in the East, or West, or whether it had ancient or modern origins."[2]

The vision of Islam espoused by many modernists is a more liberal, inclusive, humanistic, and even secular interpretation of Islam that is greatly distrustful of Islamist political discourses. By "secular," what is intended is a model of social relations in which the boundaries between religious discourse and political legitimacy are not collapsed, not one in which one would seek an exile of the religious from all of the public domain. The modernists' suspicion of models of governments that base themselves on Islamic discourses often provides their critics with ammunition to accuse them of laxness of religious practice. Whether it is warranted or not, modernists have often been perceived as being less observant than their conservative coreligionists.

LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND TWENTIETH CENTURY

One of the characteristics of the modernist movement in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century was its transregional, translinguistic, and transnational character. While figures such as Muhammad ʻAbduh and Rashid Rida worked in Egypt, others such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, and Fazlur Rahman hailed from South Asia. Figures such as Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani" moved with seeming ease from Iran and Afghanistan to the Ottoman Empire. One could mention other well-known figures such as the Malaysian Chandra Muzaffar, the Indonesians Ahmad Hassan and Nurcholish Madjid, the Algerian/French Mohamed Arkoun, and the American Amina Wadud to give a sense of its global reach.

Still, moving toward and into the twentieth century, a few Islamic modernists stood out above the rest. Almost all later modernists engaged with the ideas of the following figures either explicitly or implicitly.

Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani" (1838–1897): Along with his disciple ʻAbduh, Afghani is seen as the most important of the nineteenth-century Muslim modernists. In the Sunni Arab world, he adopted the name Afghani to distance himself from his Iranian Shiite heritage. He was instrumental in arguing for a vision of Islam that adopted modern sciences. He is a good example of the ambiguity many modernists have vis-à-vis realpolitik, at times supporting the British imperial forces, at times opposing them.

Muhammad ʻAbduh (1849–1905): Along with Afghani, ʻAbduh published the highly influential journal *al-ʻUrwa al-wuthqa* (The Firm Bond), a title that harkens back to Qur'an 2:256. Initially exiled from Egypt, ʻAbduh eventually returned to become Mufti of Egypt. Generally considered the most influential of the nineteenth-century Muslim modernists in terms of his impact on later thinkers, ʻAbduh was responsible for many reforms in the educational system.

Rashid Rida (1865–1935): Rida is a link between ʻAbduh and twentieth-century modernists. His journal *al-Manar* was one of the most important means for disseminating modernist ideas. He too talked explicitly about the need for renewal (*tajdid*) and renewing (*tajaddud*), connecting these concepts back to the aforementioned hadith that God sends a renewer (*mujaddid*) at the beginning of every century.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938): This South Asian thinker is widely credited for having been the philosophical inspiration behind the creation of the state of Pakistan. One of the few Islamic modernists with a serious interest in poetry and mysticism, he is remembered for having argued for the importance of dynamism in Islamic thought. His widely influential *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* simultaneously harkens back to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's masterpiece *Ihya ʻulum al-din* even as it took its discourse into the twentieth century.

Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988): A British-trained scholar of Islam, Rahman highlighted the importance of educational systems in the reinvigoration of Islam. For the last 20 years of his life he taught at the University of Chicago, beginning a long legacy of exiled Muslim intellectuals who took up teaching posts in Europe and North America. A fierce critic of both fundamentalism and Sufism, Rahman is usually acknowledged as the doyen of Islamic modernism in the latter half of twentieth century. Unlike many modernists, Rahman was profoundly steeped in the tradition of Islamic philosophy, especially that of Mulla Sadra of Shiraz (d. 1632 CE).

PROGRESSIVE ISLAM

One of the most significant developments in modernist Islamic thought in the last generation has been the various understandings of Islam that go under the rubric of "progressive Islam." Fully immersed in postmodern critiques of modernity, progressive Islam both continues and radically departs from the 150-year-old tradition of liberal Islam. Many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernists generally displayed an uncritical, almost devotional, identification with modernity, and often (though not always) bypassed discussion of colonialism and imperialism. Progressive understandings of Islam, on the other hand, are almost uniformly critical of colonialism, both in its nineteenth-century manifestation and in its current variety.

Progressive Muslims develop a critical and non-apologetic "multiple critique" with respect to both Islam and modernity. This double engagement with the varieties of Islam and modernity, plus an emphasis on concrete social action and transformation, are the defining characteristics of progressive Islam today.

Unlike their liberal Muslim forefathers (who usually were fore*fathers*), progressive Muslims represent a broad coalition of female and male Muslim activists and intellectuals. One of the distinguishing features of the progressive Muslim movement as the vanguard of Islamic (post)modernism has been the high level of female participation and leadership. This is particularly the case in Western countries where a majority of Muslims who self-identify as progressive are woman. The majority of progressive Muslims also highlight women's rights as part of a broader engagement with human rights.

Progressives measure their success not in developing new theologies, but rather by the amount of ground-level change for good that they can produce in Muslim and non-Muslim societies. As a number of other prominent authors and I have noted in the volume *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism,* this movement is characterized by a number of themes: striving to realize a just and pluralistic society through critically engaging in Islam, a relentless pursuit of social justice, an emphasis on gender equality as a foundation of human rights, a vision of religious and ethnic pluralism, and a methodology of nonviolent resistance.[3]

Muslim Libera(c)tion

Progressive Muslims perceive themselves as the advocates of human beings all over the world who through no fault of their own live in situations of poverty, pollution, oppression, and marginalization. A prominent concern of progressive Muslims is the suffering and poverty, as well as the full humanity, of these marginalized and oppressed human beings of all backgrounds who are called *mustad'ifun* in the Qur'anic context. The task of progressives in this context is to give voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and confront the "powers that be" who disregard the God-given human dignity of the *mustad'ifun* all over this Earth. Muslim progressives draw on the strong tradition of social justice within Islam from sources as diverse as the Qur'an and the Hadith (statements of the Prophet Muhammad) to more recent spokespersons such as Ali Shari'ati. The Qur'an itself specifically links fighting for the cause of God (*Sabil Allah*) to the cause of *mustad'ifun.*

The methodological fluidity of progressive Muslims is apparent in their pluralistic epistemology, which freely and openly draws from sources outside of Islamic tradition, so long as nontraditional sources serve as useful tools in the global pursuit of justice. These external sources include the liberation

theologies of Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Rebecca Chopp as well as the secular humanism of Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, and others. Progressive Muslims are likely to combine a Qur'anic call for serving as "witnesses for God in justice" (Qur'an 42:15) with the task of a social critic to "speak truth to the powers."

As is the case with many feminists and African American scholar-activists, progressives do not accept the dichotomy between intellectual pursuits and activism. Whereas many (though not all) of the previous generations of modernist Muslims were defined by a purely academic approach that reflected their elite status, progressive Muslims realize that the social injustices around them are reflected in, connected to, and justified in terms of intellectual discourses. They are, in this respect, fully indebted to the critiques of Edward Said. A progressive commitment implies by necessity the willingness to remain engaged with the issues of social justice as they unfold on the ground level, in the lived realities of Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Progressive Muslims follow squarely in the footsteps of liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff, who in his *Introducing Liberation Theology* deemed a purely conceptual criticism of theology devoid of real commitment of the oppressed as "radically irrelevant."[4] He recognized that *liberação* (liberation) links together the concepts of *liber* ("free") and *ação* ("action"): There is no liberation without action. The aforementioned *Progressive Muslims* volume states: "Vision and activism are both necessary. Activism without vision is doomed from the start. Vision without activism quickly becomes irrelevant."

This informed social activism is visible in the many progressive Muslim organizations and movements, including the work of Chandra Muzaffar with the International Movement for a Just World in Malaysia, the efforts of Farid Esack with HIV-positive Muslims in South Africa, and the work of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi with groups such as the Iranian Children's Rights Society. Progressive Muslims are involved in an astonishing array of peace and social justice movements, grassroots organizations, and human rights efforts.

Toward an Islamic Humanism

At the heart of the progressive Muslim interpretation of Islam is a simple yet radical idea: every human life, female and male, Muslim and non-Muslim, rich or poor, "Northern" or "Southern," has exactly the same intrinsic worth. The essential value of human life is God given and is in no way connected to culture, geography, or privilege. A progressive Muslim agenda is concerned with the ramifications of the premise that all members of humanity have the same intrinsic worth because each member of humanity has the breath of God breathed into them: "And I breathed into humanity of

my own spirit'' (Qur'an 15:29; 38:72). This identification with the full human nature of all human beings amounts to nothing short of an Islamic Humanism. In this global humanistic framework, progressives conceive of a way of being Muslim that engages and affirms the full humanity of all human beings, that actively holds all responsible for a fair and just distribution of God-given natural resources, and that seeks to live in harmony with the natural world.

Engaging Tradition

Progressive Muslims insist on a serious engagement with the full spectrum of Islamic thought and practices. There can be no progressive Muslim movement that does not engage the textual and material sources of the Islamic tradition, even if progressives themselves debate which sources these should be and how they ought to be interpreted. Progressives generally hold that it is imperative to work through inherited traditions of thought and practice: Sunni, Shiite, Sufi, juridical, philosophical, theological, mystical, poetical, ''folk Islam,'' oral traditions—all must be engaged. In particular cases, they might conclude that certain preexisting interpretations fail to offer Muslims sufficient guidance today. However, they can only faithfully claim such a position after—and not before—a serious engagement with tradition.

Social Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism

Justice lies at the heart of Islamic social ethics. Time and again the Qur'an talks about providing for the marginalized members of society: the poor, the orphan, the downtrodden, the wayfarer, the hungry, and so on. Progressive Muslims believe that it is imperative to translate the social ideals of the Qur'an and Islamic teachings in a way that those committed to social justice today can relate to and understand. For all Muslims, there is a vibrant memory of the Prophet talking about the true believer as one whose neighbor does not go to bed hungry. Progressives hold that in today's global village, it is time to think of all of humanity as one's neighbor.

Progressive Muslims begin with a simple yet radical stance: the Muslim community as a whole cannot achieve justice unless justice is guaranteed for Muslim women. In short, there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender justice. Gender justice is crucial, indispensable, and essential. In the long run, any progressive Muslim interpretation will be judged by the amount of change in gender equality it is able to produce. Gender equality is a touchstone for the broader concerns for social justice and pluralism. As Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner stated, ''Women's rights *are* human rights.''

Progressive Muslims strive for pluralism both inside and outside of the *Umma*. They seek to open up a wider spectrum of interpretations and practices marked as Muslim, and epistemologically follow a pluralistic approach to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. In their interactions with other religious and ethnic communities, they seek to transcend the arcane notion of "tolerance," and instead strive for profound engagement through both commonalities and differences.

Progressives and Jihad

The pervasive discourse of jihad has become thoroughly associated with Islam, to the point that one may legitimately ask whether the term can be redeemed. Both Muslim extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and Western Islamophobes in fact do use the term to mean a holy war. On the Muslim side, one can point to the public statement of Usama Bin Laden: "In compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country. . . ."[5] Scholars of Islamic law have been quick to point out that this alleged "fatwa" violates both the letter and the spirit of Islamic law. At the same time, one has to acknowledge that Bin Laden supports his own recourse to violence through the discourse of jihad. This same sentiment is reflected in the Western Islamophobic side, where many Christian Evangelicals are recasting centuries-old polemics against Islam in a new guise.

Progressive Muslims counter both the Muslim extremists' and the Western Islamophobes' definition of jihad. Instead, they hold firmly to the notion that jihad is key, not in the sense of holy war and violence, but rather in its root meaning of resistance and struggle. In this regard, progressives in the Muslim community emphasize the responsibility to engage the wider social order by confronting injustice and inequality, while always remembering that one must do so in a nonviolent way. In doing so, they are the heirs of Muslim visionaries such as the Sufi Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi ("Washing away blood with blood is impossible, even absurd!") as well as exemplars of nonviolence such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Dalai Lama. This new understanding of jihad, which seeks to uphold resistance to well-entrenched systems of inequality and injustice through nonviolent means, is one of the key contributions of progressive Muslims. Building on the comments of religious figures such as the Dalai Lama (in his Nobel acceptance speech), they recognize that even terms like "peace" are insufficient when peace is not connected to justice and the well-being of humanity. The goal is not simply peace in the sense of the absence of war but rather a peace that is rooted in justice.

Also revealing their indebtedness to American voices of social justice, many progressive Muslims are inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For these Muslims, King embodies speaking out for justice from the depths of a religious commitment, from the midst of a faith community to that community and beyond. Thus, he is a great source of inspiration for many progressive Muslims who want to be voices of conscience speaking not in the wilderness but in the very midst of society. Progressives thus seek to be voices for global justice speaking firmly and powerfully to the Powers that Be, while perpetually affirming the dignity of all human beings.

AN ISLAMIC REFORMATION?

Modernist Muslims are often asked whether their project constitutes an "Islamic reformation." They answer the question in both the affirmative and the negative. It is undeniably true that there are serious economic, social, and political issues in the Muslim world that need urgent remedying. Much of the Muslim world is bound to a deeply disturbing economic structure that provides natural resources (oil, and so on) for the global market, while at the same time remaining dependent on Western labor, technological know-how, and staple goods. This economic situation is exacerbated in many parts of the modern Muslim world by atrocious human rights situations, crumbling educational systems, and worn-out economies. Most modernist Muslims would readily support the reform of all such institutions.

However, the term "reformation" carries much baggage. In speaking of the "Islamic reformation," many people have in mind the Protestant Reformation. It is this understanding that leaves many Muslims uneasy. Theirs is not a project of developing a "Protestant" Islam distinct from a "Catholic" Islam. Most insist that they are not looking to create a further split within the Muslim community as much as to heal it and to urge it along. For this reason, iconic figures such as Ebadi eschew the language of "reform" and "reformation" but call instead for a return to a real, just Islam.

A GLOBAL PHENOMENON OR A WESTERN ISLAM?

It would be a clear mistake to reduce the emergence of progressive Islam to a new "American/Western Islam." Progressive Muslims are found everywhere in the global Muslim *Umma*. When it comes to actually implementing a progressive understanding of Islam in Muslim communities, certain communities in Iran, Malaysia, and South Africa lead, but do not follow, the United States. Many American Muslim communities—and much of the leadership represented in groups such as ICNA, ISNA, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations—are far too uncritical of Salafi (if not outright Wahhabi) tendencies that progressives oppose.

Wahhabism is by now a well-known, puritanical reading of Islam that originated in eighteenth-century Arabia. It was not until the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia that Wahhabism had the financial resources necessary to import its mission all over the world, including to the United States. In spite of their exclusivist ideology, Wahhabis have had a great working relationship first with the British and since the 1930s with the U.S. administration. Lesser known is the Salafi movement, which represents an important school of Islamic revivalism. Salafis espouse a return to the ways of the first few generations of Muslims, the ''Righteous Forefathers.'' Central to their methodology has been a recentering of the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. It would be a mistake to view American Muslim organizations such as ISNA and ICNA as Wahhabi. On the other hand, interpretations of Islam such as Shi'ism and Sufism are usually absent from these organizations, and the representation of important and contested issues such as gender constructions tends to reflect a conservative, Salafi bend as well. It is in opposition to both Wahhabism and Salafism that many Muslim progressives define themselves.

On the other hand, one also has to acknowledge that the European and, more importantly, the North American contexts have provided fertile grounds for the blossoming of progressive Islam. Many participants in this young movement have found a more hospitable and open environment in the North American milieu than in Muslim-majority areas. Even the contested public world of post-9/11 America still offers great possibilities for conducting public conversations about difficult matters of religion and politics. It would be hard to imagine such critical conversations taking place freely and openly in many Muslim countries. Also one has to acknowledge the significance of North American educational institutions, as well as many fruitful cross-pollinations with liberal religious institutions, human rights groups, and so on.

GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO ISLAMIC MODERNISM

In today's political climate, it is a cliché to begin a discourse on Islam and Muslims with talk of ''crisis.'' It is not my intention here to add to an unrelenting assault on Islam and Muslims. Instead, I intend to explore the profound challenges and precious opportunities confronting Muslims who self-identify as progressives or as advocates of Islamic reform.

Muslim modernists face a whole host of challenges. Many modernists have profound internal disagreements on issues ranging from hermeneutical approaches to Qur'an and Hadith, women's rights, and so forth. More problematic is the ongoing question of modernity versus the hegemony of the West. Many modernists have wrestled with the question of how to incorporate political institutions and science from the same Western civilizations that

have colonized and exploited much of the third world, including many Muslim-majority countries.

Some initial phases of Islamic modernism became entangled in apologetic presentations of Islam in which Islam was idealized and imagined as a perfect system that had been sullied through the stagnation of later Muslim generations. Such a presupposition does not enable one to deal constructively with problematic questions in the Qur'an or in the lives of the Prophet and the early Companions, even as it dismisses useful resources in later developments.

Other challenges are external. Muslim modernists do not have a natural institutional home, other than in academia and some media outlets. They have continuously struggled to find a home in the *madrasa* system, although in some places they achieved a measure of success because of efforts of Muhammad 'Abduh and others. In other cases, they have been forced to live in exile (Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Abu Zayd, and so on) for having been persecuted in their homeland. Politically they have often come under attack from a number of directions: from state authorities who find the modernists' political critiques disturbing; from secularists who are puzzled by the modernists' continued involvement with Islam; from traditional religious authorities whose own understanding of Islam is undermined by the modernists. Some modernists such as Fazlur Rahman and Iqbal have had the strange distinction of being targets of both persecution and large-scale admiration.

In conclusion, it is clear that Muslims are entering yet another age of critical self-reflection. Given the level of polemics and apologetics, it is extraordinarily difficult to sustain a critical level of subtle discourse. Yet Muslims today are not merely initiating social transformation, they are also reflecting much wider processes at the same time. They are well-situated to provide the most balanced and critical syntheses of Islam and modernity.

Moving more specifically to the North American context, Muslims who seek to engage in the grand project of Islamic reform face a number of challenges. Writing as a self-identifying progressive Muslim, I will here seek to enumerate some of these challenges in order to position progressive reforms as a beacon for—and not against—the community:

(1) Transcending antagonistic attitudes toward mainstream Muslim communities:

There is a substantial difference between being an *alternative* to the mainstream Muslim community (in terms of particular practices such as gender rights, standing up against racism and classism, and so on) and being consistently *antagonistic* to the mainstream Muslim community.

I am very concerned about some statements from some progressive Muslims in North America that repeatedly characterize the mainstream Muslim community as Islamist, Salafi, or Wahhabi. In today's political climate, acting in such a way puts peoples' lives, family, property, freedom, and reputation in danger. All too often those of us in the progressive community have felt that we must be unrelenting in our critiques in order to be effective. Surely, one

can be capable of nuance without surrendering the mandate of being radical in the cause of justice and truth.

My own hope is that we in the progressive movement can be a light to the community, a voice of conscience, a mandate of justice, and an example of compassion, so that through the power of our moral calling, we will persuade many in our community to do which is most just, most beautiful, and most compassionate.

(2) Struggling against secular tendencies in the progressive movement:

One of my hopes for the progressive Muslim movement in North America had been that it would create a "big tent" in which Muslims of various persuasions could gather to strive for common projects, some focusing on the interpretation of Islam in the modern world and others working on concrete and grounded social projects. While the openness of this proposition still appeals to me, I have also come to see that in practice it is extremely challenging to create such a "big tent." In particular, one is reminded that just as there are shades and gradations of conservative Muslims, not all Muslims who self-identify as secular are the same. The secular criticism of the Christian Arab writer Edward Said was not the same as the secularism of Karl Marx, or that of contemporary Europe. For Said, part of the process of "secular criticism" was as follows: "In its suspicion of totalizing concepts, in its discontent with reified objects, in its impatience with guilds, special interests, imperialized fiefdoms, and orthodox habits of mind, criticism is most itself, and if the paradox can be tolerated, most unlike itself at the moment it starts turning into organized dogma."[6] It is worth exploring whether the term "Progressive Islam" has become a dogma in itself, and thus ironically unlike itself—as Said suggests. As a loving self-critique, I would suggest that many progressives have become every bit as rigid, authoritarian, and dogmatic as the conservative movements they so readily criticize. This represents a moral and philosophical failure of the highest magnitude.

Among Muslims today, one also finds a variety of secular tendencies. Some Muslims come from a traditional heritage but are essentially agnostic in their outlook (often combined with the most antireligious interpretations of Marxism), whereas others interpret secularism as a call to keep the state powers out of the religious game. I have come to realize that in our desire to establish the widest possible ground for a "big tent" in some progressive Muslim organizations, we have left ourselves open to the problem of not having enough of a common ground. At the risk of overstating the obvious, a progressive Muslim movement has to start with at least a minimum of commitment to a *tawhidic* perspective, the guidance of the Qur'an, and the earnest desire to emulate the Prophetic Sunna. While I will always support those who seek to prevent the state (whether it is the United States, Israel, Iran, India, or any other state) from favoring one religious community over others, I have come to realize that a Marxist interpretation of secularism, with

its hostility toward religion as a source of inspiration, presents one of the greatest dangers to the progressive Muslim movement. This danger is all the more pernicious because so many progressives identify with the Marxists' devastating critique of socioeconomic class issues, colonialism, and so on. Yet this ideology actually suffocates the spirit of progressive Islam.

(3) Engagement with the multiple intellectual and spiritual traditions of Islam:

It is not just to outside critics that Muslim progressives have too often seemed "insufficiently Muslim." I think there has been an unfortunate and unnecessary hostility among some of us to take seriously the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Islam, and to draw on the vast resources it offers us for living as meaningful deputies (*khalifa*s, as in Qur'an 2:30) of God in the world today. In the *Progressive Muslims* volume, I stated:

> Progressive Muslims insist on a serious engagement with the full spectrum of Islamic thought and practices. There can be no progressive Muslim movement that does not engage the very "stuff" (textual and material sources) of the Islamic tradition, even if some of us would wish to debate what "stuff" that should be and how it ought to be interpreted....
>
> To state the obvious, a progressive Muslim agenda has to be both progressive and Islamic, in the sense of deriving its inspiration from the heart of the Islamic tradition. It cannot survive as a graft of secular humanism onto the tree of Islam, but must emerge from within that very entity. It can receive and surely has received inspiration from other spiritual and political movements, but it must ultimately grow in the soil of Islam.[7]

My serious concern at this point is that some of the organizations that have adopted the rubric "progressive Muslims" today are dangerously close (if not already there) to falling into the trap of providing an "Islamic veneer" for many positions without seriously taking on the challenge of engaging the traditions of Islam.

(4) Reviving the spiritual core of a reform movement:

One of my great hopes had been that this reform movement would be marked by a genuine spiritual core, something that would combine and yet go beyond the earlier rationalistic twentieth-century movements with Sufi etiquette and postmodern, postcolonial liberation stances. Yet for me the spiritual core has always been and remains at the center. As I see it, there is no way of transforming Muslim society without simultaneously transforming the hearts of human beings.

(5) Recovering courtesy (*adab*) and spiritual manners (*akhlaq*):

It is imperative for the lofty social ideals of progressive Muslims to be reflected in the *adab* and *akhlaq* of our interpersonal relations. I continue to hope that some of the Sufi ethics of dealing with fellow human beings would characterize our dealings with one another, to always recall and remember the reflection of the Divine Presence and the divine qualities in one another.

Some would call this notion romantic or idealistic. Maybe so. I for one continue to hold on firmly to the notion that without romance and idealism we have no hope of being and becoming fully human. Here, as in so many places, Gandhi had a keen observation: ''As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality.''[8]

On far too many occasions, many of us Muslim progressives have lost the moral basis of interpersonal relations. What is particularly disappointing to me is that we have time and again risen to defend those whose points of view and practices have been hard to justify under any existing interpretation of Islam but have been quick to demonize many others who have done no more than simply present what have up until now been traditional and common Muslim attitudes toward issues that are now part of the culture wars.

My hope is that a community marked by true love and devotion for one another would be capable of incredible transformations. That, after all, has been Islam's legacy starting from the time of the prophets, including our own beloved Messenger of God. What a beautiful example this is for each of us to emulate, as we all seek to establish small, humane communities around us. People who are rude and uncivil to one another have no hope of transforming the world, much less themselves.

Love heals. Love transforms. That is why I have felt so strongly that progressive Muslim communities, and indeed all human communities, should be permeated by loving person-to-person relationships.

CONCLUSION

I pray that the above comments, as hard as they have been to write, will inspire some to address the present shortcomings of the progressive Muslim movement. Why bother? Simply because I believe that the ability of Muslims in North America to contribute to the grand project of Islamic reform is at stake.

I recently had a chance to spend a long day in conversation with some Christian activists who had worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One of their insightful comments stayed with me: What Martin said was the same as what many Christian preachers had been saying for 100 years. What was new was that people had heard the message so many times that when a charismatic teacher came along, what he said simply resonated with that which they had known to be true in the innermost chambers of their hearts. Our task today is not to simply parody Martin Luther King, Jr., as much as some of us may idealize him. I believe that the best we can do at this moment in history is to work on projects large and small to establish righteous communities and just and compassionate interpretations of Islam. In time, our struggle—indeed, our *jihad* in the sense most relevant for today's

condition—will have the benefit of making its truths self-evident in the innermost chambers of Muslim hearts.

Our struggle is both for ourselves and for our children. We have to be willing to live with the realization that none of us will get to live long enough to actually see the realization of a just world. But in the endeavor to bring that world about, our own lives will have achieved the dignity and meaning to which we are entitled. And we pray that our children may come to live in a world in which their dignity as Muslims, as citizens of this planet, and as human beings is engaged and acknowledged.

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME

One of the persistent challenges facing Muslims in the modern era has been in developing a coherent methodology toward tradition. Indeed it would be fair to say that both modernists and their more conservative coreligionists have been guilty of selective and inconsistent appropriations of the existing traditions. Some of these issues are brought up in my discussion above. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah brilliantly examines the ramification this has had for a crucial issue, the boundaries of innovation and heresy in Islam. Mohammed Azadpur explores the most neglected of Islamic sciences in modern times, philosophy. Indeed the whole issue of the extent to which Muslims may (or rather, did indeed) connect themselves to pararevelational wisdom such as that of the Greek masters is a fascinating case for Muslims' ability today to engage the wisdom (and perils) of modernity.

Two of the chapters in this volume, by Jamillah A. Karim and Aminah Beverly McCloud, address the experiences of African American Muslims. For far too long the experiences of "American Muslims" have been read, discussed, and mediated through the lens of first- and second-generation Muslims. This fallacy can be maintained no more. These two chapters remind us that if Muslim brotherhood and sisterhood are to be realized in Muslim America, a new reality must be created. Ziba Mir-Hosseini's chapter is a powerful reminder of how the gender wars are a perennial indication of the struggles that characterize modern Islam. There is indeed no site more contested in the world than the bodies of Muslim women. The chapter by Scott Sirajul Haqq Kugle continues the engagement with gender issues by moving more specifically toward a frank, and no doubt contested, discussion of sexuality. Ebrahim Moosa continues his examination of critical thought in modern Islam by reminding readers that the working out of the challenges facing contemporary Muslims cannot be achieved outside of a thorough and rigorous methodology.

The last two chapters seek to break down the boundaries of the facile dichotomy of "Islam" versus the "West" in different ways. Hugh Talat Halman embarks on a fascinating discussion of the unfolding of spiritual

movements in the West that are in many ways as rooted in historical Islamic tradition as they are in the post–World War II West. My culminating chapter seeks to identify the ambitions of some Muslim Neo-conservatives to live in an "us versus them" world, and asks us to strive for a world in which there can be a "rendezvous of victory for all."

NOTES

1. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1964), 11.

2. Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* trans. and ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

3. Omid Safi, ed., *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 6.

4. See Leonardo Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology,* trans. Clodovis Boff (Turnbridge Wells, Kent, U.K.: Burns & Oates/Search Press Ltd., 1987).

5. Bin Laden quotation from http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm. Arabic original at http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/fatw2.htm.

6. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 242. Said further identified "secular criticism" as not a movement opposed to religion, but rather as follows: "It is not practicing criticism either to validate the status quo or to join up with a priestly caste of acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians. The realities of power and authority—as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies...," Ibid., 223.

7. Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims,* 7–8.

8. Mahatma Gandhi, *Quotes of Gandhi,* ed. Shalu Bhalla (New Delhi, India: UBS Publishers, 1995), 25.

1

Creativity, Innovation, and Heresy in Islam

Umar F. Abd-Allah

The terminology of Islamic law and theology includes words for innovation, heresy, and related concepts like hypocrisy, masked infidelity, and apostasy. Generally, each term has its own distinct sense, but the term *bid'a* (innovation/heresy)—the focal point of this chapter—is the broadest and most problematic. It covers a range of overlapping meanings, allowing for confusion and misuse. The word *bid'a* is a familiar part of everyday Muslim discourse, although it is often used with less than optimal understanding. Certain groups are addicted to the term, using it mistakenly and without discretion as a rhetorical sledgehammer to crush ideas and practices they do not like.

When *bid'a* is used by itself without qualifying adjectives, it generally has a pejorative sense, although in traditional Islamic usage—especially when qualified—it covered a wide spectrum of connotations, ranging from the highly positive to the utterly reprehensible. A sound feeling for the theological and legal implications of *bid'a* and related concepts is as relevant for Muslims today as ever, since it constitutes a defining element in their consciousness and unquestionably affects their behavior. Sherman Jackson emphasizes the need for instilling a critical modicum of Islamic awareness in the Muslim community, which he calls "Islamic literacy."[1] This core understanding must be sufficient to give everyday Muslims basic immunity against the incompetent pseudoscholarly opinions that occasionally bombard them in the name of Islam. As will be shown, Islamic literacy is consistent with the dictates of *ijtihad* (utmost intellectual inquiry), which was not just a scholarly obligation but a requirement of the lay community to pass judgment on the aptitude of scholars.

Bid'a connoted both innovation and heresy, and this chapter treats its association with both phenomena. Historically, its association with theological heresy was particularly common. For those familiar with Islamic scholarship, the term *zandaqa* (atheistic heresy) readily comes to mind in the context of the Islamic conception of heresy and is also examined. But, with reference to

heresy, *bid'a* was more inclusive, while *zandaqa* tended to be restricted to heresies regarded as so cynical and inherently hostile to religion that, as with apostasy (*irtidad* or *ridda*), jurists censured those who held them.

BASIC TERMS

The concept of *bid'a* was common in pre-Islamic Arab usage. The root from which the word derived is morphologically linked with a distinct but similar radical, *BD'* (the difference being between the final letter *hamza* (') in this root and the final *'ayn* (') in *bid'a*). *BD'* meant "to start or begin something," while the primary meaning of *bid'a* was "to start or begin something novel." Among the various words directly derived from the root of *bid'a* was the noun *Badi'* (Originator), cited in the Qur'an as one of God's attributions: "Originator (*Badi'*) of the heavens and the earth" (Qur'an 2:117; 6:101).[2] Use of *al-Badi'* with reference to God denoted the uniqueness of His creative act and implied that He brought the world into existence without a previously existing prototype.[3] As an adjective, *badi'* was applied to outstanding works of human genius, especially those of great poets and other masters of the spoken and written word.[4]

The term *bid'a* was less nuanced in its pre-Islamic context than in Islamic usage. It was consistently pejorative and was employed to condemn violations of tribal custom. *Bid'a* was applied to actions and ideas that lacked identifiable prototypes in custom and were unauthorized by tribal role models. It constituted a sort of tribal heresy and innovation, deviating from established norms and the ways of great forebears from the past.

The message of the Prophet Muhammad challenged the established order of Arabia and was condemned as *bid'a*. The Prophet countered by making the opposite claim and turned the *bid'a* controversy on its head, undercutting the allegations of his enemies. Islam was neither a heresy nor an innovation, his teaching asserted, but constituted a restoration of the legacy of Abraham, Ishmael, and the earlier Arabian Prophets (Hud and Salih), ancient ancestral traditions that the idolatrous Arab tribes had distorted over time. The ideological battle is mirrored in a Qur'anic verse commanding the Prophet to declare to his opponents: "Say [to them]: I am no novelty [*bid'*] among [God's] Prophet-Messengers" (Qur'an 46:9). *Bid'*, the word used in this verse, is almost identical in meaning and morphology to *bid'a*. While it clearly indicates that the Prophet's message possessed direct continuity with ancient prophecy—a point made explicitly in other texts—it also intimated that the pagan beliefs and customs of Muhammad's contemporaries were *bid'a* because they lacked continuity with antiquity and had veered long ago from the best of ancient Arab ways.[5]

The pre-Islamic concept of *bid'a* belonged to a wider semantic frame that linked it with its opposite, *Sunna* (established tradition). Islam took over

the *bidʿa–Sunna* paradigm but redefined its content. In pre-Islamic Arabia, *Sunna* constituted the well-known repository of tribal custom and embodied the norms of acceptable thought and practice. Each instance of *bidʿa* conjured up the image of a long-established *Sunna* that it threatened. Rooted in tribal practice, the pre-Islamic *bidʿa–Sunna* paradigm was doggedly conservative and functioned to insure the status quo.[6]

With the advent of Islam, the term *Sunna* came to be closely connected with the normative teaching and conduct of the Prophet Muhammad. The link between *Sunna* and *bidʿa* was maintained, but both concepts were rooted in scriptural authority and complemented by the creative imperative to perform *ijtihad*.[7]

In contrast to *bidʿa,* the words *zandaqa* and *zindiq* (heretic/atheist) were foreign loan words and did not occur in Islam's primary sources. They were borrowed from Aramaic or Middle Persian, most likely from the Aramaic *ziddiq* (righteous), a Semitic cognate of the Arabic *siddiq* (eminently truthful). *Ziddiq* was used by Aramaic-speaking Manichaeans[8] for their spiritual elite. In the pre-Islamic period, Oriental Christians applied the word to Manichaeans in general, which accounts for its initial restriction in Islamic parlance to Muslim heretics suspected of harboring Manichaean beliefs.[9]

Zandaqa's foreign origins may account for its comparative lack of semantic breadth in Arabic usage. It was not, as some scholars have mistakenly claimed, the standard Islamic term for sectarian heresy, a role more properly suited for *bidʿa*.[10] *Zandaqa* was restricted to particular types of extreme religious infidelity, which were essentially atheistic. Although Muslims first used *zandaqa* for dualistic heresies of a Manichaean variety, the word quickly shifted focus to any cynical or generally mocking frame of mind inimical to religious belief. Consequently, in later juristic and theological usage, *zandaqa* was almost inseparable from hypocrisy (*nifaq*) and apostasy. Because the expression of atheistic beliefs or public mocking of Islam was a capital offense, *zandaqa* was usually concealed or expressed only in private. As such, it took on the sense of "masked infidelity."

By contrast, *bidʿa* as a form of heresy rarely referred to people who took their religious convictions lightly or hid them from others. Like "heretics" of other faiths, those of Islam were often zealous and outspoken and undertook missions to win followers. In the standard parlance of jurists and theologians, such highly committed, movement-oriented heretics were not guilty of *zandaqa* but were classified under the label of "people of [various types of] *bidʿa* and passionate excesses" (*ahl al-bidaʿ wa al-ahwaʾ*). *Zandaqa,* on the other hand, seldom constituted identifiable and coherent movements.[11]

Because theological *bidʿa* applied only in extreme cases to denial of faith, it was rarely a capital offense, but, since *zandaqa,* if proven, was almost always fatal, it served on occasion as a powerful weapon in the ruler's arsenal to destroy political rivals. When a head of state leveled the charge of *zandaqa* against an opponent, it meant almost certain death. Not surprisingly,

the accusation of *zandaqa* in political circles generally had nothing to do with heresy but was so vague and unfounded that it was virtually impossible to determine the exact nature of the victim's alleged offense.[12]

Defining the content of creedal orthodoxy was a primary goal of traditional Islamic theology and reflected a correlated concern with delineating heresy. Theologians often drew sharp lines where the Prophet had not. It was his habit, instead, to suffice with simple declarations of faith, which he was generally willing to accept at face value as illustrated at the death of Abu Talib, his uncle, clan leader, and chief benefactor. Although Abu Talib vigilantly protected his nephew Muhammad from their tribe's hostile and powerful oligarchy, he died without embracing the Prophet's religion. As Abu Talib lay dying, the Prophet stood by his side and implored: "Uncle, [just] say, 'There is no god but God,' a [single] sentence by which I may bear witness on your behalf in God's presence."[13]

A similar doctrinal minimalism is reflected in other frequently attested Hadith (Prophetic Traditions) that report him saying: "Whoever dies knowing that there is no god but God shall enter the Garden."[14] He also taught: "Whoever bears witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger, God will forbid the Fire from [touching] him."[15] On one occasion, such divine munificence disconcerted the Companion 'Umar, who challenged another Companion, Abu Hurayra, upon hearing him give the good news of salvation at the Prophet's behest to anyone "who bore witness that there was no god but God, having certainty of it in his heart." 'Umar went to the Prophet immediately and asked: "Messenger of God, did you [truly] send Abu Hurayra…to give good tidings of the Garden to anyone he met who bore witness that there is no god but God, being certain of it in his heart?" The Prophet answered: "Yes." 'Umar replied: "Do not do that. I fear people will place their reliance upon it. Let them keep performing [good] actions." The Prophet replied: "Then let them [keep doing that]."[16]

Conversion to Islam has remained a simple process, requiring little more than the testimony of faith: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God's Messenger." But Muslim theologians rarely made it as straightforward to remain orthodox and stay within the fold. Only a few of them were content with the twofold testimony of faith as sufficient proof of accepted belief. Each denomination elaborated its own corollaries of the basic testimony of faith and subsidiary beliefs that they contended the basic testimonies of faith explicitly or implicitly entailed.

BID'A IN ISLAMIC SCRIPTURAL SOURCES

The Qur'an contains one reference to innovation directly derived from the root of *bid'a*. The verse pertains to Jesus and the first Christian believers: "[We] instilled kindliness and mercy in the hearts of those who followed

him and monastic practice, which they innovated [*ibtadaʿuha*]. We did not prescribe it for them but out of the pleasure of God. Yet they failed to observe it as it should have been observed" (Qur'an 57: 27). The passage is especially noteworthy because it refers in an ostensibly favorable light to *bidʿa* in a matter of worship, an area where many Islamic scholars deemed innovations most pernicious.

A common reading of the verse, corroborated by its wording, asserts that monasticism was a human innovation, which God did not prescribe for Jesus' followers but which they themselves instituted, seeking God's pleasure. It is not their religious innovation that is reprimanded but their failure to fulfill it. Early Qur'anic exegesis traces this interpretation to a Companion of the Prophet named Abu Umama, who asserted that Jesus' followers "instituted [certain] innovations which God had not prescribed upon them, seeking God's good pleasure through them, but they failed to observe them properly, and God reproached them for their departure from [proper observation]." Consistent with this reading, many classical commentators linked the verse to the Islamic law of ritual vows, which, by their nature, have an improvised quality and generally demand fulfillment once one has chosen to perform them.[17]

Another reading insists that God Himself ordained monasticism; hence, it was not technically a *bidʿa*. He intended its practice solely for His pleasure and reproached those monks who fell short of what was required. Others construed the verse as condemning monasticism itself for being a religious *bidʿa,* but their reading of the text is the most forced of the three and lacks the textual exactitude required in Islamic jurisprudence to constitute a categorical proof.[18]

References to *bidʿa* are common in the Hadith collections of all Islamic sects—Sunni, Shiʿi, and Ibadi.[19] One shared hadith on the subject is the well-known admonition of the Prophet: "The worst of things are monstrosities [*muhdathat;* also "innovations"], and every *bidʿa* is misguidance."[20] For Sunnis and Shiites alike, this hadith constitutes one of the most categorical condemnations of innovation and was taken at face value by literalists in both communities. But, in both denominations, the dominant opinion held that the Prophet's admonition was not a categorical prohibition of innovative ideas or practices but a warning to stay within sound legal parameters in accepting or rejecting them. New ideas and practices had to be consistent with established precedents and recognized principles.

If it seems far-fetched that the apparently literal condemnation of *bidʿa* in this hadith could be honestly construed as anything less than a categorical reprimand against every form of creativity, such a nonliteral approach was not problematic for most classical scholars. Their hermeneutics recognized the polysemic nature of sacred texts, which they interpreted in the light of a number of references like the subtleties of Arabic, historical context, related texts, and relevant Islamic principles. In the case of this hadith,

the hermeneutical tradition unhesitatingly limited its meaning to unwarranted *bid'a*. Thus, despite the hadith's apparent generality, it was understood as implicitly qualified, the typical reasoning for which is illustrated below. As one scholarly commentary states: "[This is a] general statement [understood as having] specific qualifications [*'amm makhsus*]."[21]

Another hadith well-attested in Sunni and Shiite collections pertains to the sanctity of the Prophetic city of Medina, which Muhammad proclaimed a religious sanctuary like the ancient Abrahamic city of Mecca: "So whoever introduces [*ahdatha;* also "innovates"] in [Medina] a [monstrous] innovation or gives shelter there to such an innovator, upon him shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind. No disbursement shall be accepted from him or any ransom."[22] In a Shiite version, the hadith adds: "'Messenger of God, what is the innovation [intended]?' He replied: 'Whoever [wrongfully] kills a [human] soul without [legal recompense] for [another] soul, maims [a body] without indemnity, innovates a *bid'a* having no *Sunna,* or [wrongfully] seizes plunder of exceptional value.'" Another Shiite transmission defines the monstrous innovation as murder, and the word *ahdatha* used in this Hadith occurs in a number of Prophetic declarations with specific reference to that crime.[23]

Sunni interpretations of the hadith essentially agreed with the Shiite view. A famous Sunni commentator, Nawawi, parsed the innovation referred to as iniquitous behavior.[24] Ibn Hajar, another renowned Sunni scholar, understood the hadith's broad wording as implicitly delimited by its context in specific reference to the holy city's sanctuary status. Thus, for Sunni and Shiite scholars in general, the illustrations given for the damnable innovations referred to in the hadith clearly involved the gross violation of Medina's sanctuary status, especially by acts of lawless violence.[25]

An intriguing reference to *bid'a* in Sunni, Shi'i, and Ibadi Kharijite sources deals with the second caliph 'Umar's decision to institute supererogatory group prayers during the nights of Ramadan within a decade of the Prophet's death.[26] According to Sunni and Ibadi sources, the Prophet once led his Companions in similar prayers for a few nights of Ramadan shortly before his death but discontinued the practice, expressing concern that, if he continued leading the vigils, God would make them obligatory, which Muhammad feared would impose an excessive burden upon his community.

During his caliphate, 'Umar observed people praying randomly in the Prophet's mosque during the nights of Ramadan individually and in small groups and took the decision to unite them behind a single prayer leader, instituting the Ramadan vigil as a group prayer. Entering the mosque on a subsequent night and witnessing the congregation praying in unison, he declared: "What an excellent *bid'a* this is!"[27] Sunni sources emphasize that the Prophet's cousin 'Ali, who later became the fourth caliph and is revered by all Shi'i schools as their first Imam, endorsed 'Umar's action and continued his policy. Sunnis report that 'Ali once remarked that

'Umar "illuminated the month of fasting" by instituting the group prayer. Another Sunni version relates that one night in Ramadan during 'Ali's caliphate, he passed by mosques lit up with candles for the people to perform the congregational vigil and said: "May God illuminate 'Umar's grave just as he illuminated for us our mosques."[28]

The Zaydis, generally regarded as the closest of all Shiites to Sunnis, upheld the validity of the Ramadan group prayer, affirming that 'Ali continued the practice during his caliphate.[29] The Imami Shi'i school was generally antagonistic toward 'Umar and viewed the historical record differently, rejecting 'Umar's decision as an unlawful *bid'a*. Like Sunnis, they confirmed that the Prophet led the community in Ramadan night prayers for a short period. Unlike Sunnis, they contended that the Prophet not merely abandoned the prayer but emphatically banned it in groups, concluding with the words: "Every *bid'a* is misguidance, and the path of every misguidance [leads] to the Fire." Imami sources agree that 'Ali allowed the community to continue praying the Ramadan group vigil during his caliphate. Despite the fact that he personally opposed this practice, the pro-'Umar sentiment was too strong, and the people were so attached to this "*sunna* of 'Umar" that it was not politically feasible for 'Ali to ban it.[30]

Like the Qur'anic verse on monasticism, one of the most interesting points about 'Umar's "excellent *bid'a*" is that it falls squarely within the domain of ritual acts of worship and, with the caveat of the Imami perspective, was widely regarded as good. Sunni sources report that Abu Umama—referred to earlier in conjunction with the verse on monasticism—admonished Muslims to be vigilant in observing the group vigil of Ramadan. He linked this practice explicitly to the Qur'anic allusion to monasticism and would say: "You have innovated the [practice of] standing in prayer during Ramadan, although it was not prescribed for you, for only the fasting [of that month] was prescribed. So, now that you have done it, remain constant in keeping up the prayer and never abandon it."[31]

An eminent Sunni scholar, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, believed that 'Umar called his decision a *bid'a* because the Prophet had not instituted the vigil as a *Sunna* nor had Abu Bakr, the first caliph after him. Nevertheless, 'Umar declared it "an excellent *bid'a*" to indicate its initial legitimacy in the Prophet's eyes and to emphasize to the people that, although it was technically a *bid'a*, they should have no misgivings about it, since the Prophet had only declined to institute it for fear of making it obligatory.[32] The reasoning here is predicated on a standard principle of Islamic jurisprudence that nothing specific to the Prophet's *Sunna* can be given a new legal status—obligatory or otherwise—after his death if he did not indicate that status during his lifetime. Thus, 'Umar's "excellent *bid'a*" put into practice something the Prophet had looked upon favorably, while avoiding the Prophet's fear of its becoming obligatory and burdensome. In the same vein, another famous Sunni jurist, Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi, described 'Umar's institution of the prayer as a

Sunna and a *bid'a* at the same time; it was a *Sunna* by virtue of the Prophet's short-term precedent but a *bid'a* because the Prophet declined to institute it. Ibn al-'Arabi concluded: "How excellent was this *bid'a* as a revived *sunna* and fully accomplished act of obedience!"[33]

These and other Islamic sources demonstrate the linguistic range of *bid'a*. In the abstract, however, *bid'a* was generally pejorative, although in certain circumstances, as we have seen, it could be transformed into its opposite. *Sunna,* by contrast, was almost invariably affirmative but had a semantic potential similar to *bid'a* and could take on negative connotations, especially when used for reprehensible types of *bid'a* that became customary. A famous hadith relates: "No human soul shall be killed wrongfully but that Adam's first son shall carry a share of the guilt, for he was the first human to institute the *sunna* of murder."[34] Another Hadith uses *Sunna* in two different ways, first in reference to a good *bid'a* and second with regard to an odious one: "Whoever establishes a good *sunna* [*sunna hasana*] in Islam that is followed in practice afterward, will have recorded to his merit a reward equal to the reward of anyone who practices it, without any of their rewards being at all diminished. Whoever establishes an evil *sunna* [*sunna sayyi'a*] in Islam that is followed in practice afterward, will have recorded against him a burden equal to the burden of anyone who practices it without any of their burdens being at all lessened."[35]

BID'A IN THE LEGAL TRADITION

The *Sunna–bid'a* paradigm was shared by all Islamic denominations. All concurred on the fundamental obligation to follow the Qur'an and *Sunna*. But each sect and every school within a sect espoused different criteria for defining, interpreting, and applying the concepts.

The four principal Sunni schools differed among themselves on how to interpret Qur'anic texts. They concurred on the probity of all the Prophet's Companions as authoritative transmitters of his *Sunna*—a crucial Sunni tenet and major point of difference between them and the Shi'is and Ibadis—but each Sunni school employed markedly different methods in their understanding and utilization of the *Sunna* and, consequently, arrived at diverse conclusions regarding its legal status and content.[36]

The Shi'is, who had distinctive interpretations of the Qur'an, relied no less heavily upon the *Sunna* than the Sunnis. For the Imamis, the *Sunna* went beyond the teachings and normative example of the Prophet to include those of the 12 divinely guided Imams. Despite such differences, Shiite sources contain authoritative texts identical in wording to those of other denominations like: "Follow the reports of God's Messenger, God bless and keep him, and his *Sunna*."[37] The Ibadis ascribed, in principle, to the same obligation to follow the Qur'an and *Sunna* but differed by granting special status in its

transmission to the "the just Imams," meaning the first two rightly guided caliphs, Abu Bakr and 'Umar (excluding the caliphs 'Uthman and 'Ali) and to other authoritative figures like the Prophet's wife 'A'isha.[38]

Likewise, regarding *bid'a,* the theologians and jurists of all three Muslim denominations conceived of the term in similar ways. They concurred that the concept of *bid'a* in its negative sense did not connote a blanket condemnation of all innovative ideas and practices simply because they were new, while they rejected all *bid'a* that appeared inconsistent with Prophetic precedent and Islam's underlying principles.[39] The noted jurist and legal theorist Shatibi emphasized that the very notion that Islamic law stood for categorical prohibitions against change was grossly absurd to classical jurists. All scholars, he contended, concurred that it was intellectually repulsive to insist that Muslims could never diverge from the cultural norms of early Islamic Arabia or that any new development in life must be regarded as an unwarranted *bid'a.*[40]

One of the most basic Islamic paradigms is the distinction between matters that are essentially nonritualistic and mundane (*mu'amalat*) and others that are ritualistic and otherworldly in nature (*'ibadat*). The first category refers to matters like war and peace, buying and selling, and marriage and divorce. Such nonritualistic concerns of human societies, although falling under the rubric of divine revelation and relevant to the law, were believed to serve tangible social goals and benefits. Consequently, they had rationales (tangible legal objectives), that lent themselves to rational scrutiny, and were open to legal analysis and amendment. For this reason, many notable scholars held that *bid'a* did not pertain to the domain of nonritualistic matters.[41] By contrast, matters of ritual like belief, prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage were an exclusively divine prerogative related to otherworldly realities like the secrets of salvation and the unseen. They served the purpose of purifying the soul, bringing people close to God, and winning His eternal pleasure. Consequently, they lacked discernable rationales, were inscrutable to reason, and were closed to legal analysis and amendment. For the great majority, ritualistic matters were the primary focus of *bid'a;* for many others, belief and ritual were its sole domain.

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr was among those who held that *bid'a* was strictly ritualistic: "As for making innovations in the practical workings of this world, no constriction and no fault pertains to one who does so."[42] Technological progress, crafts, building projects, urban development, and the like lay, according to this view, totally beyond the purview of *bid'a*. Dissenting scholars who included mundane affairs under the rubric of *bid'a* applied it only to appalling innovations that encroached scandalously upon central precepts of the law like unjust taxation (*maks*), nepotism, administrative corruption, and hanging pictures of judges and rulers in public places, which all scholars, regardless of how they conceived of *bid'a,* agreed were forbidden.[43]

Given the nuances of *bid'a,* classical Islamic jurisprudence evaluated it according to the five ethical categories of the religious law: obligatory, recommended, neutral, disliked, and forbidden. Thus, the gamut ran from obligatory *bid'a* to forbidden. Any *bid'a* that fell into one of the first three categories was regarded as consistent with the precepts and general principles of Islam.[44] Ibn Hajar wrote: "Put precisely, if a *bid'a* comes under the rubric of things regarded as good in the law, it is good. If it comes under the rubric of things ill-regarded in the law, it is ill-regarded. Otherwise, it belongs to the category of neutral things, and [in general] [*bid'a*] may be divided into the five [ethical] divisions."[45] Today, these nuances of *bid'a* have been largely forgotten. For many Muslims, the word is a red flag, invariably designating extreme religious error beyond any possibility of dispassionate discussion. In such cases, it has become a narrowly parochial force of polarization, obsessively opinionated and devoid of critical depth or scholarly protocol.

COUNTERBALANCING *BID'A* WITH *IJTIHAD*

The concept of *bid'a* was classificatory and judgmental. Though it had positive nuances and was not intended to rule out new ideas, it clearly served as a control mechanism and put ideas on trial, exonerating some and disapproving others. Its fundamental conception was conservative and potentially inhibiting. The criteria of *bid'a* imposed a restrictive frame on creative ideas to ensure continuity with tradition and conformity with legal principle. It must be stressed, however, that setting clear parameters does not necessarily encumber creativity and may even facilitate it. Such demarcation of parameters with the purpose of simultaneously facilitating and directing creative thought was clearly central to the original concept of *bid'a.*

The positive potential of *bid'a* as a control mechanism was reinforced by the intellectual process of *ijtihad,* which served as a complement to the notion of *bid'a* but greatly overshadowed it in legal prominence. By nature, *ijtihad* was encouraging, forward looking, and creative. Unlike *bid'a, ijtihad* was neither judgmental nor classificatory but constituted a methodological process of judgment. The final results of its diverse procedures of "utmost intellectual inquiry" were ultimately subject to the scrutiny of the *bid'a–Sunna* paradigm and its corollaries, which determined whether the resulting judgments of *ijtihad* were consistent with the Prophetic tradition or not.

Al-Baji, a traditional Sunni jurist, defined *ijtihad* as "expending one's fullest [intellectual] capacity in search for the right ruling."[46] The art of *ijtihad* required "utmost scholarly exertion on the part of the individual jurisconsult with a view to arriving at a personal opinion" regarding a new matter of legal concern.[47] Bernard G. Weiss notes: "The law was not something to be passively received and applied; it was rather something to be

actively constructed by human toilers eager to gain the approval of their Lord for their effort."[48]

Ijtihad derives from the same root as *jihad*. Their common radical, *JHD*, denotes expending extreme effort to achieve a difficult but worthy goal or to overcome a great obstacle for the sake of something good. Although *jihad* clearly applies to armed struggle and brings war immediately to mind, the word constitutes a central principle of Islamic ethics. *Jihad* epitomizes faith as active engagement in the world to make it better. Its high point is the inner struggle for discipline and self-knowledge, but it also covers an unlimited array of personal and group efforts as disparate as childbirth, earning a livelihood, getting an education, taking care of family, helping others, and striving for social justice.

Ijtihad shared *jihad*'s ethical force but pertained to the realm of abstractions, ideas, and critical thought in the endeavor to find solutions by expending extreme effort. Fazlur Rahman speaks of *ijtihad* as an intellectual and moral *jihad* but, more concretely, as "the effort to understand the meaning of a relevant text or precedent in the past, containing a rule, and to alter that rule by extending or restricting or otherwise modifying it in such a manner that a new situation can be subsumed under it by a new solution."[49] Weiss contends that *ijtihad*'s primary semantic field originated in ancient Arabia's harsh agrarian culture, so familiar to the Prophet's first followers, most of whom had experienced oasis agriculture at first hand. The word conjured up in their minds "the image of the cultivator toiling daily under the sun, struggling against the adversities of climate, weed, and sometimes intractable soil." He continues: "Given the difficulties encountered in the work of formulating the law, the jurists saw this work as a kind of toil and customarily called it *ijtihad* ('toil,' 'arduous effort,' 'striving')."[50]

To engage in the process of *ijtihad* is an Islamic religious duty of the first magnitude. As George Makdisi notes, it was the imperative to perform *ijtihad* that led to the formation of the classical schools of Islamic law.[51] All Muslim denominations had *ijtihad* traditions, although certain schools within each denomination put greater restrictions upon it than others. As we have seen, all Muslims upheld the validity of the famous hadith: "Every innovation is misguidance." But none understood it as contradicting the necessity of *ijtihad*, however much they differed on details that governed the process.[52]

What made *ijtihad* inherently optimistic was the Prophet's promise that those who practiced it would be rewarded in the next world, even if their answers were wrong. The Prophet stated: "If a judge [*hakim*] does *ijtihad* and gets the right answer, he receives two rewards, and, if he is [honestly] mistaken, he gets one."[53] Similar transmissions asserted that every person performing *ijtihad* was ultimately right—even if technically wrong—which prompted theologians and jurists to debate whether truth was singular or multifaceted in nature and raised the question of there being more than one

correct answer for any given question. Some argued that all dissenting legal opinions could be correct in their own right, despite the fact that they were mutually contradictory.[54] Abu Hanifa, eponym of the largest Sunni school of law, said: "Every *mujtahid* (person performing *ijtihad*) is right, although [ultimate] truth in God's presence is [only] one." He explained that a *mujtahid* who fails to discover God's ultimate truth is, nevertheless, deemed right by virtue of the integrity of his personal *ijtihad*.[55] The majority of scholars were content simply to say that every *mujtahid* receives a reward when mistaken, not by virtue of the error but because of obedience to God in fulfilling the command to undergo the labor of *ijtihad*.[56]

Like *bid'a,* a pertinent question regarding *ijtihad* concerned the domains where it was valid and where it was not. Many restricted *ijtihad* to nonritualistic matters, but their opinion was not a matter of consensus. 'Umar's institution of the Ramadan night prayers clearly belonged to the ritualistic domain, as we have seen, and, in Baji's opinion, was a consummate example of *ijtihad*. It must be noted, however, that Baji discerned an important political (nonritualistic) dimension behind 'Umar's decision. The practice of people praying the Ramadan night prayer individually or in small groups had the potential to prove divisive in times of civil discord. A single, unified group of worshippers symbolized and reinforced the community's cohesiveness, but disparate congregations praying at the same time in a common space behind different prayer leaders could—and probably would—be manipulated in times of trouble to underscore factional divisions and accentuate political rivalries.[57]

Ijtihad was a function of the jurisconsult's membership in society.[58] Because the masses were untrained in the religious sciences, classical tradition required them to follow the scholars. Thus, *ijtihad* was not meant to be an ivory-tower pursuit but a living "social partnership" between legal scholars and the society at large, which continually presented them with "real legal problems" and "questions to work with."[59] But even the common people were required to perform their own type of *ijtihad* by striving to discern the competence of individual scholars and selecting the best to follow, a principle emphatically asserted by the majority of the Sunni and Shiite schools.[60]

Ijtihad is a perpetual obligation. A well-known maxim of Islamic law asserts: "There shall be no denunciation of changed legal judgments with changing times, places, and circumstances."[61] Al-Dabbusi, a prominent Sunni jurist, noted that what may be allowable in one time or place may become prohibited in another because of changing circumstances, just as what was prohibited may become allowable by the same criterion. He added that changing times and places are not the only considerations; there are other ones as well, like the social group a person belongs to. What is beneficial for one segment of society may be harmful for another.[62]

The renowned Sunni jurist al-Qarafi asserted that it was a matter of consensus that scholars were wrong to hand down legal judgments without

performing *ijtihad* but merely by adhering strictly to ancient texts in their books without regard for cultural realities. The fault of such jurists was inexcusable and constituted disobedience of God. Their blind adherence to their legal compendia was misguidance in the religion of Islam and violated the original objectives behind the rulings of the earlier scholars and great personages of the past whom they claimed to be following.[63] A great jurist of the next generation, Ibn al-Qayyim, commented on al-Qarafi's opinion, saying:

> This is pure understanding of the law. Whoever issues legal rulings to the people merely on the basis of what is transmitted in the compendia despite differences in their customs, usages, times, places, conditions, and the special circumstances of their situations has gone astray and leads others astray. His crime against the religion is greater than the crime of a physician who gives people medical prescriptions without regard to the differences of their climes, norms, the times they live in, and their physical conditions but merely in accordance with what he finds written down in some medical book about people with similar anatomies. Such is an ignorant physician; the other is an ignorant jurisconsult but more detrimental.[64]

Undoubtedly, many traditional jurists not only failed to live up to the standards of Qarafi and Ibn Qayyim but also demonstrated an exasperating lack of creativity and stifled its spirit in others. Their rigidity created the widespread impression among Muslims and Westerners alike (including a surprising number of present-day academics and writers of good standing) that "the door of *ijtihad*" was "closed" as a matter of religious principle. The conspicuous decline of *ijtihad* at certain periods of Islamic history reflected a general social and intellectual malaise but not legal or theological doctrine. In fact, there is little historical evidence that the door of *ijtihad* was ever closed, and, in any case, since Islam has nothing comparable to an ecclesiastical hierarchy, the door of *ijtihad* never had a doorkeeper.[65]

The question of who was qualified to perform *ijtihad* was not set by the Prophet but by traditional scholars. Their stipulations typically required that a *mujtahid* be an upright Muslim of sound mind with full command of the Arabic language and mastery of the core disciplines of Islamic learning, including knowledge of the Qur'an and *Sunna,* consensus, methods of legal reasoning, and the overriding objectives of the law.[66]

It is to the jurists' credit that they did not list gender as pertinent to the requirements for *ijtihad,* and Islamic intellectual history contains several examples of famous women who excelled in the art. Fatima bint Muhammad al-Samarqandi, for example, who lived in twelfth-century CE Syria, ranks as an eminent *mujtahida*. She wrote and taught several works on Hadith and Islamic law, and her husband, Abu Bakr al-Kasani, author of the unique legal compendium *Bada'i al-Sana'i* (Marvels of Things Devised) and one of the most brilliant Sunni jurists, never issued a legal opinion based on his personal *ijtihad* unless his wife, Fatima, reviewed and signed it first.[67]

For more than a millennium, the process of speculative *ijtihad* was virtually the monopoly of traditional scholars, and the requirements they set for it remained largely unchallenged. Their control over *ijtihad* was first systematically called into question during the pivotal eighteenth century—the eve of Muslim modernity—when various Sunni and Shi'i revivalists demanded easier criteria.[68] As a rule, the revisionists of both camps leaned in favor of a textual literalism easy for the common people to grasp but alien to the dominant Sunni and Shi'i traditions. A similar emphasis on literalism reemerged as the major tendency of Muslim Activist (fundamentalist) thought in the twentieth century.

Conceptualization of *ijtihad* underwent even more radical change after the full onslaught of colonial rule and Western modernity in the nineteenth century. New approaches to education and *ijtihad* became primary concerns for the Muslim Modernist movement (1840–1940), which categorically rejected classical criteria for both. As Charles Kurzman observes, the Modernists (who were unfailing supporters of parliamentary democracy) challenged "the authority of the past and the authority of the credential" and, despite a general lack of traditional training, claimed their right to perform *ijtihad*, insisting in some cases that traditional scholastic education had become so sterile and far removed from modern realities that, instead of qualifying scholars for *ijtihad*, it actually disqualified them.[69]

The Muslim Modernist movement suffered greatly with the rise of Western-oriented secular nationalism in the wake of World War II, but the debate over *ijtihad* has continued until the present, especially within the ranks of Activist thinkers, who, like the Modernists before them, generally lack traditional training, claim the prerogative of *ijtihad* for themselves, and reject the authority of classical tradition, often turning it upon its head. The decline of traditional religious authority over the past three centuries not only made radically different criteria for *bid'a* and *ijtihad* possible but has also come to constitute one of the most critical cultural breaks in Islamic history.

As Richard Bulliet notes, the decline of classical authority in modern times was radically precipitated by the ubiquity of a periodical press and modern media coupled with national policies of universal education, which created mass readerships and heightened expectations: "The new technology enabled authors to become authorities simply by offering the reader persuasive prose and challenging ideas." Religious knowledge was removed from the scholastic classroom and pulpit, and various types of new religious authorities emerged who articulated their messages effectively in the language of the people and found large audiences. The classical moorings of *ijtihad* and Islamic thought came undone, and, as a consequence, the Muslim world finds itself today "immersed in a crisis of [religious] authority," the resolution of which is likely to take generations.[70]

The "new authorities" represent a diverse spectrum of intellectuals from liberal Modernists to radical Activists. Numbered among their ranks are the

most influential Islamist ideologues of the twentieth century, whose claims to *ijtihad* have driven their agenda of creating a one-dimensional, politicized Islam. Most notable among them are Sayyid Qutb (Egypt, d. 1966), Abu A'la Mawdudi (India/Pakistan, d. 1979), and 'Ali Shari'ati (Iran, d. 1977), and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989). With the exception of Khomeini, all of these "new authorities" lacked classical training and adamantly rejected the relevance of traditional scholarship.[71] In recent years, Usama Bin Laden, an engineer, and his associate Ayman al-Zawahiri, a pediatrician, have emerged as the most notorious "new authorities" and frequently martial the accusation of *bid'a* against their enemies and utilize their personal claim to *ijtihad* to justify "extremist positions."[72]

PRESENT AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

An authentic and sophisticated understanding of *bid'a* as a control mechanism and *ijtihad* as an inducement for creativity is vital for Muslims today. Its greatest interpretative resource is the legacy of Islamic thought through the ages. Marshall Hodgson identifies Islam's "great pre-Modern heritage" as, perhaps, the richest source Muslims possess in creating an integral vision of their religion's place in the modern world but notes: "One of the problems of Muslims is that on the level of historical action their ties with relevant traditions are so tenuous."[73]

It is unrealistic, however, and even undesirable to hope for meaningful restitution of the classical tradition and sophisticated application of concepts like *bid'a* and *ijtihad* without the revision and renewal necessary to make the tradition compatible with present-day needs and bring it in harmony with the criteria emphasized above by Qarafi and Ibn Qayyim. Yet without enlightened educational institutions that attract talented students and in the absence of curriculums that impart a mature understanding of modern thought and realities, it is unlikely that a sophisticated understanding of the tradition can ever be fostered, and our multitudes of old books and dusty manuscripts will remain little more than the extraordinary historical fossils of a defunct civilization. Moreover, until classical Islamic learning is made meaningful to contemporary Muslims, it is hard to fault those who question its relevance.

As harmful and heterodox as the "new authorities" sometimes are, they must be judged in the context of our times and not just condemned by citing bits and pieces of scripture or referencing contrary interpretations in the classical tradition. In Islam, like other faith traditions, religious ideas—whether of innovation and heresy, creativity or the lack of it—are never set in stone, nor do they emerge from a vacuum. What people say about the religions they follow reflects the lives they are living, and it is naïve to expect an optimal understanding of any religion in the absence of a tolerable socio-political context. Harsh conditions produce callous perceptions, regardless

of the people or religion in question. When we attempt to talk about Islam in the modern world, the generally dismal sociopolitical context of its followers is unavoidable. As Gilles Kepel stresses, to ignore that context and focus instead on essentialist pronouncements about Islam or Muslim civilization is "pure Walt Disney."[74]

Classical Islamic thought was the product of a particular sociopolitical milieu. Contrary to the Activist cliché that there is no separation of religion and state in Islam, Muslim religious establishments for more than a millennium were largely free of governmental control and jealously guarded their autonomy. Unlike the Muslim world today, the classical Islamic world was culturally advanced, economically and militarily formidable, and relatively stable politically. Above all, as Rahman stresses, it produced generations of thinkers who were self-assured and psychologically invincible in confronting new challenges.[75] It was conditions such as these that produced urbane scholars who could define and interact with the concepts of *bid'a* and *ijtihad* in an authentic and productive way.

It should be sufficiently clear from what has preceded that *bid'a*, as a control mechanism within the Prophetic law, should constitute a standard of excellence and not be invoked merely to condemn unfamiliar practices, preclude critical thought, or stifle personal expression and community development. Likewise, a sound conception of the process of *ijtihad* should serve as a positive source of inspiration for the entire Muslim community, scholars and non-scholars alike, in the search for meaningful answers to contemporary challenges.

As an American Muslim, I feel it is imperative that our community free itself from erroneous understandings of *bid'a* and develop full competence to perform *ijtihad* independently. Both within the United States and abroad, the growing American Muslim community, which presently constitutes roughly two percent of the nation's population, is one of the most promising and least known Muslim minorities in the world. Like our counterparts in Canada, considerable sectors of the American Muslim community, in contrast to the majority of our coreligionists in the European Union, are highly educated and constitute, per capita, one of the most talented and prosperous Muslim communities in the world. Moreover, American Muslims, at least for the time being, enjoy a relatively favorable sociopolitical context with extensive freedoms and political enfranchisement. Few Muslims in the world today are in a more advantageous position to comprehend the essence of modernity and formulate new directions for *ijtihad* in keeping with the best traditions of Islamic thought and the imperatives of a pluralistic world.

Bulliet suggests that resolution of the present crisis of religious authority in the Muslim world may ultimately fall on the shoulders of the professoriate of Muslim universities, many members of which are already performing *ijtihad* with considerable sophistication. He emphasizes, however, that the professoriate of the Muslim world will only be able to fulfill this task if it extricates

itself from governmental control and secures broad freedoms similar to those of tenured professors in the West.[76]

It is worth noting, in conclusion, that Western universities are currently producing highly qualified graduates in Islamic Studies, many of whom are quickly becoming influential intellectuals in the Muslim community and are committed to producing rigorous scholarship as well as fostering Islamic literacy. Perhaps, this new generation of intellectuals will carry the banner of *ijtihad* into the twenty-first century and lay the foundations for a genuinely modern Islamic culture that has intellectual and spiritual depth, is actively committed to humanity and the world, and represents our best hope for quelling the harmful innovations and violent heresies of our time.

NOTES

1. See the American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM) homepage. Available at http://www.alimprogram.com/overview/introduction.shtml (accessed May 2006).

2. It is often mistakenly said that, in Islam, God has 99 beautiful names. According to Islamic theology the beautiful names of God are infinite. Those authentically attested in Islamic scripture—the Qur'an and Hadith—are well over 99, the word *al-Badi'*, referenced in the quotation being one of those. The well-known Tradition regarding the 99 names is correctly interpreted, as classical scholars have frequently noted, to mean that God had 99 "special names," listed in some of the pertinent Traditions, such that anyone who memorizes them and preserves their sanctity by behaving in a manner mindful of them in daily life will be rewarded with the Garden.

3. See Ahmad ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lugha,* 6 vols. (n.p.: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), 1:209; al-Raghib al-Isfahani, ed., Safwan 'Adnan Dawudi, *Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1992), 111; Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, *Al-I'tisam*, 2 vols. (al-Khubar, Saudi Arabia: Dar Ibn 'Affan, 1997), 1:49.

4. Al-Isfahani, *Mufradat,* 111; al-Shatibi, *Al-I'tisam,* 1:49.

5. Al-Isfahani, *Mufradat,* 111.

6. G.H.A. Juynboll, "Muslims' Introduction to His *Sahih,* Translated and annotated with an excursus on the chronology of *fitna* and *bid'a*" in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, no. 5 (1984), 308; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge, U.K.: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 44.

7. Compare Abu 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Barr, ed. by 'Abd al-Mu'ti Qal'aji, *Al-Istidhkar al-Jami' li-Madhahib Fuqaha' al-Amsar wa 'Ulama' al-Aqtar fi-ma Tadammanahu al-Muwatta' min Ma'ani al-Ra'y wa al-Athar,* 30 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Wa'y, 1993), 5:152 and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a ila Tahsil Masa'il al-Shari'a*, 20 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1971), 18:97.

8. The Manichaeans arose in the third century of the Christian era, probably out of Judeo-Christian circles in Mesopotamia. Their dualist theology was based on a radical dichotomy between the spirit and the world. The Manichaeans sought

salvation and enlightenment through self-mortification and shunning the pleasures of the world.

9. A less convincing etymology derives the word from the Middle Persian *Zand Avesta,* in which the term *zand* refers to the translation and commentary of the Zoroastrian Avesta. Accordingly, a *zindiq* meant one who "distorted the exegesis of the Avesta." See "*zandik,*" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* CD-ROM Edition, vols. 1–11 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), cited below as *EI*, 11:510; Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's* Faysal al-Tafriqa bayna al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56; Maria Isabel Fierro Bello, "Accusations of '*Zandaqa*' in al-Andalus," *Quaderni di studi arabi*, no. 5–6 (1988): 251; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 35–36.

10. See, for example, "*Bid'a*," in *The Enclyclopedia of Islam*, 1:1197.

11. See Bello, "Accusations of '*Zandaqa*'," 251, 257; "*Zindik*," in *EI,* 11:510.

12. See Bello, "Accusations of '*Zandaqa*'," 251, 257.

13. Abu al-Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hajjaaj, ed. Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi, *Sahih Muslim*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Matba'at Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d.), 1:54.

14. Muslim, *Sahih,* 1:55.

15. Ibid., 1:58.

16. Ibid., 1:60–61.

17. See Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Razi al-Jassas, ed. 'Abd al-Salam Muhammad 'Ali Shahin, *Ahkam al-Qur'an,* 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1994), 3:556–557; Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-'Arabi, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Qadir 'Ata, *Ahkam al-Qur'an,* 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 4:183; Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, ed. Ahmad 'Abd-Allah al-Qurashi Raslan, *Al-Bahr al-Madid fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Majid*, 6 vols. (Cairo: Hasan 'Abbas Zaki, 2001), 6:76.

18. Al-Shatibi, *Al-I'tisam,* 1:371–372.

19. Sunnis make up the majority of the Muslim community, and, although their schools disagree on many points, all Sunnis share a belief in the probity of the Prophet's Companions, who constitute their chief means of access to foundational Islamic religious knowledge. The Shi'a make up a substantial minority of the Muslim community. Their schools also disagree on many points but share the belief that the Prophet's cousin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, was his rightful heir and that the community's spiritual leadership fell by right to various members of the House of the Prophet in subsequent generations, who constitute their principal means of foundational knowledge. The Ibadis make up a small but significant minority in Oman and parts of North Africa and are the only surviving remnant of the ancient Kharijites, although Ibadi doctrines and practices are notably more moderate than those of the early Kharijites.

20. Muslim, *Sahih,* 2:592; compare al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a,* 11:511–512, 18:40.

21. Ahmad ibn 'Umar al-Qurtubi, ed. Muhyi al-Din Dib Matu, *Al-Mufhim li-ma Ashkala min Talkhis Kitab Muslim*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1999), 3:508; Muhammad ibn Khalfa al-Ubbi, *Ikmal Ikmal al-Mu'lim*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 3:23; Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Sanusi, *Mukammil 'Ikmal al-Ikmal*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 3:23.

22. Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, ed. Mustafa al-Bugha, 6 vols. *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Medina: Dar al-Turath, 1987), 2:662, 6:2662; Muslim, *Sahih,*2: 994–998; al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a,* 19:18.

23. Al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a,* 19:15, 18.

24. Muslim, *Sahih,* 2:994. Although not specifically cited, Nawawi's commentary is given in the margin throughout this edition.

25. See Ahmad ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari' bi-Sharh al-Imam Abi 'Abd-Allah Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukharii,* 13 vols. (n. p.: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 4:86.

26. For the Ibadis, see Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Kindi, ed. 'Abd al-Hafiz Shalabi, *Bayan al-Shar' al-Jami' li-al-Asl wa al-Far',* 62 vols. in 48 ('Uman: Wizarat al-Turath al-Qawmi, 1982–1993), 15:196–197, 202.

27. Malik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta',* ed. Bashshar 'Awwad Ma'ruf, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1997), 1:169–170; al-Bukhari, *Sahih,* 2:707–708; 'Abd al-Razzaq ibn Hammam, ed. Habib al-Rahman al-A'zami, *Al-Musannaf,* 12 vols. (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1983) 4:258, 264–265; 'Abd-Allah ibn Abi Shayba, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Shahin, *Al-Kitab al-Musannaf fi al-Ahadith wa al-Athar,* 9 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), 2:164; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari,* 4:250–252.

28. See 'Abd al-Razzaq, *Al-Musannaf,* 4:258; Yusuf ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhid li-ma fi al-Muwatta' min al-Ma'ani wa al-Asanid,* 18 vols. (Cairo: Al-Faruq al-Haditha li-al-Tiba'a, 1999), 4:93–95, 100.

29. Zayd ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, *Musnad al-Imam Zayd* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Hayah, 1966), 158–159.

30. Al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a,* 5:191–193.

31. Ibn al-'Arabi, *Ahkam al-Qur'an,* 4:183; al-Shatibi, *Al-I'tisam,* 1:374.

32. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhid,* 4:93 and *Al-Istidhkar,* 5:136, 147.

33. Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi, ed. Muhammad 'Abd-Allah Walad Karim, *Kitab al-Qabas fi Sharh Muwatta' Malik ibn Anas,* 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1992), 1:283; compare Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari,* 4:252.

34. Al-Bukhari, *Sahih,* 1:161.

35. Muslim, *Sahih,* 4:2059–2060.

36. They differed, for example, in the use of nontextual sources like the established practice of Medina, recognized as authoritative in the Maliki and Hanbali school, and took different positions on the authority of isolated hadiths, hadiths without complete chains of transmission, and the reports and opinions of the Companions and Successors. See Umar F. Abd-Allah, "Malik's Concept of *'Amal* in the Light of Maliki Legal Theory" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Chicago, 1978), 1:155–195.

37. See al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a,* 18:22–24.

38. See al-Kindi, *Bayan al-Shar',* 1:92–93.

39. Al-Isfahani, *Mufradat,* 111.

40. Al-Shatabi, *Al-I'tisam,* 2:568.

41. Al-Shatabi, *Al-I'tisam,* 1:50.

42. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Istidhkar,* 5:153.

43. Al-Shatabi, *Al-I'tisam,* 2:570, 594.

44. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Istidhkar,* 5:152.

45. Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari,* 4:253.

46. Sulayman ibn Khalaf al-Baji, ed. Nazih Hammad, *Kitab al-Hudud fi al-Usul* (Beirut: Al-Zu'bi li-al-Tiba'a, 1973), 64.

47. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 2, 66.

48. Bernard G. Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 89.

49. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7–8.

50. Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law,* 88–89.

51. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges,* 2, 66.

52. Discussion of the hadith comes later in the paper. I presume the Ibadis also relate this hadith in their books but did not chance upon attestation of it in the limited number of their works currently available.

53. 'Ali ibn al-Qassar, ed. Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Sulaymani, *Al-Muqaddima fi al-Usul* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1996), 114–115; Sulayman ibn Khalaf al-Baji, ed. 'Abd al-Majid al-Turki, *Ihkam al-Fusul Ihkam fi Ahkam al-Usul*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1995), 2:714–716; 'Ubayd-Allah ibn 'Umar al-Dabbusi, ed. Mahmud Tawfiq al-Rifa'i, *Al-Asrar fi al-Usul wa al-Furu' fi Taqwim Adillat al-Shar',* 4 vols. (Amman: Wizarat al-Awqaf, 1999), 3:114–116; Ibn Amir al-Hajj, *Al-Taqrir wa al-Tahbir,* 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983), 3:306. The Ibadis took essentially the same position. See al-Kindi, *Bayan al-Shar'*, 1:92–93.

54. See al-Dabbusi, *Al-Asrar,* 3:116; cf. al-Kindi, *Bayan al-Shar',* 1:92.

55. Al-Dabbusi, *Al-Asrar,* 3:114.

56. Al-Kamal ibn al-Hammam, *Al-Tahrir,* 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983), 3:306; Ibn Amir al-Hajj, *Al-Taqrir wa al-Tahbir,* 3:306.

57. Sulayman ibn Khalaf al-Baji, *Kitab al-Muntaqa sharh Muwatta' Imam Dar al-Hijra Sayyidina Malik ibn Anas,* 7 vols. in 4 (Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'ada, 1984), 1:207–208.

58. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges,* 290.

59. Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law,* 128.

60. Al-Baji, *Ihkam al-Fusul,* 2:727; Ibn al-Qassar, *Al-Muqaddima,* 26; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985), 204–205.

61. See Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, ed. Muhammad al-Mu'tasim bi-Llah al-Baghdadi, *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Alamin,* 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1998), 3:5.

62. Al-Dabbusi, *Al-Asrar,* 3:115–116.

63. Taken from al-Qarafi's *Furuq* as quoted in the work of my student, friend, and colleague 'Adil 'Abd al-Qadir Quta, *Al-'Urf: Hujjiyyatuhu wa Atharuhu fi Fiqh al-Mu'amalat al-Maliyya 'inda al-Hanabila,* 2 vols. (Mecca: al-Maktaba al-Makkiyya, 1997), 1:64.

64. Quoted from Ibn Qayyim's *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in* in 'Adil Quta, *Al-'Urf,* 1:65.

65. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges,* 4, 290; Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 201–202 and 202, 59n; Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 16–17.

66. See Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence,* 374–378.

67. ʻUmar Kahhala, *Aʻlam al-Nisa',* 5 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1991), 4:94.

68. See Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 3–20; Etan Kohlberg, ''Aspects of Akhbari Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,'' in *Eighteenth-Century Renewal*, 133–153; Bernard Haykel, ''Reforming Islam by Dissolving the *Madhhabs*: Shawkani and his Zaydi Detractors in Yemen,'' in Bernard G. Weiss, ed. *Studies in Islamic Legal Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

69. See Charles Kurzman, ed., *Modernist Islam 1840–1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3–27.

70. Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 81.

71. See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 23–27, 33–35, 39–41.

72. See Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization,* 83–86.

73. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1974),3:431.

74. See Kepel, *Jihad,* xviii, 24.

75. Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 212.

76. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization,* 158–159.

2

Is "Islamic" Philosophy Islamic?

Mohammad Azadpur

At the outset, I want to disown two trivializing approaches to the question that guides this chapter. One such approach responds in the affirmative, pointing to the apparent circularity of the question that is posed. The second approach answers in the negative, arguing that Islamic philosophy refers to the species of philosophy (understood as radically other than what constitutes a religious activity) that is cultivated in the Islamic civilizations. Both of these approaches trivialize the relation between philosophy and religion and I mean to underscore that relation. A perhaps more sophisticated take on the question of whether Islamic philosophy is Islamic would be to examine the claims of the various Islamic philosophers in order to determine their conformity to Islamic doctrines. This third approach, however, faces two principal obstacles. On the one hand, it is not easy to come up with a list of beliefs to which a particular philosopher in this tradition has consistently adhered, not to mention one shared by all such philosophers. This is not to say that Islamic philosophers are incoherent; it is rather a declaration that one must exercise caution in ascribing theses to any philosopher. On the other hand, it is even more difficult to subject the beliefs of Islamic philosophers to those constitutive of Islamic faith and measure their allegiance to Islam. To be sure, there are constitutive beliefs such as *tawhid*, the belief in the oneness of God; *nubuwwa,* the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad; and *ma'ad,* the belief in resurrection and the day of judgment. But given the many possibilities of interpretation, the demands of these beliefs are not hard to meet and expanding the set of such beliefs is disputable. To be sure, there have been efforts to assess the Islamic quality of Islamic philosophy by expanding these theses and limiting their interpretations. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's (d. 1111 CE) polemic against the Islamic Peripatetics is perhaps one such effort and I will return to this later.

My strategy is to answer the question whether Islamic philosophy is Islamic in a metaphilosophical way—that is, I want to begin by asking what philosophy itself is. I do not pretend to be naïve about this question,

as I am not interested in proposing an account of philosophy that transcends all cultural and historical constraints; this is not to say that there is no such account. So let me be more precise about my initial step. Islamic philosophers inherited something from the Greeks and they called it *falsafa,* in close adherence to the Greek word *philosophia*. What was that something? I want to argue that the common understanding of what Muslims inherited from the Greeks involves a misunderstanding. Historians of Islamic philosophy consider Greek philosophy to be made up of bodies of rational knowledge formulated by different philosophers or schools of philosophy, but I want to argue with Pierre Hadot that for the Greeks philosophy was primarily the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom. I submit that this is how Islamic philosophers understood what they inherited from the Greeks. If this point is granted, then it is not hard to see that Islamic philosophy is the Islamic practice of philosophical spiritual exercises. Of course, something more needs to be said about this, and I will—by working out aspects of the prophetology that makes the philosophical way of life advanced by Islamic philosophers Islamic.

Hadot, throughout his writings and especially in *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* revives the ancient distinction between philosophical discourse and philosophy itself in order to criticize the condition of modern scholarship on ancient philosophy. He writes: "Historians of philosophy pay little attention to the fact that ancient philosophy was, first and foremost, a way of life. They consider philosophy as, above all, philosophical discourse."[1] By philosophical discourse, Hadot means the production of a "systematic explanation of the whole of reality."[2] In contrast, philosophy, for Hadot's ancient Greek philosopher, is a way of life; it is not in the service of producing a work—a rational account of reality, rather "the goal is to transform ourselves, to become wise."[3] Philosophers, as lovers of wisdom, are in training for wisdom and wisdom is not contained in a philosophical treatise, but it is a condition of the human soul.[4] The significance of the production of systematic philosophical works (for ancient philosophers) was rather in its pedagogical role in the training of the soul. Philosophy yielded systematic texts

> . . . in order that it might provide the mind with a small number of principles, tightly linked together, which derived greater persuasive force and mnemonic effectiveness precisely from such systematization. Short sayings summed up, sometimes in striking form, the essential dogmas, so that the student might easily relocate himself within the fundamental disposition in which he was to live.[5]

This, of course, does not exhaust the significance of rationally systematized philosophical treatises. One could think of other functions: for instance, attending to a tightly argued and systematic treatise assists the philosopher in transcending the limits of the empirical self and its preferred modes

of reasoning at the service of the appetites, mundane desires, or social conventions.[6]

Hadot's account of ancient philosophy as primarily a way of life or as he says elsewhere, "the practice of spiritual exercises,"[7] accentuates the centrality of ethics in the ancient philosophical enterprise. Famously, ethics concerns the good life, that is, how one ought to live, but most modern moral philosophers construe this concern as directing us to the agent's actions and the articulation of the requirements determining the rightness or the wrongness of those actions. Depending on their preference for intrinsic goodness of acts or human interests and desires, modern philosophers can be divided into deontologists and teleologists, respectively. There are those espousing hybrid theories as well, but what they all share is a focus on actions. Modern philosophy's act-centered ethics is to be contrasted with the agent-centered (Greek) virtue ethics where the focus is on the agent and her character. Virtue ethicists inquire into the cultivation of the character traits that allow the agent to lead the good life.[8] In other words, the moral agent does not resort to an algorithm (deontological, consequential, or a hybrid) to figure out what to do. Her cultivation of relevant character traits enables her to perceive the good in each particular circumstance and to pursue it.

Hadot's reading of the ancients does not simply assert the truism that their version of ethics is a virtue ethics. Rather, he claims justifiably that virtue ethics is the core of their philosophical orientation and that all of ancient philosophical production was at the service of the inner transformation constituting the good life. Even Aristotle, whose account of the highest good as contemplation culminating in thought thinking itself is often invoked to establish the priority of theory over practice, situated theory and its discursive expression in the context of the ethical cultivation of the soul. "It is sometimes claimed that Aristotle was a pure theoretician, but for him, too, philosophy was incapable of being reduced to philosophical discourse, that is, to the production of a body of abstract knowledge. Rather, philosophy for Aristotle was a quality of the mind, the result of an inner transformation."[9] To put it differently, for Aristotle, it is only after acquiring the practical traits of the soul (for example, temperance, courage, and practical wisdom) that one is drawn to and able to cultivate the theoretical intellect. I will get back to this point later.

In this part of the chapter, I want to look at the approaches of some prominent scholars of Islamic philosophy regarding what they take as that which the Muslims inherited from the Greek philosophers. I want to do this through the lens of Hadot's account of ancient philosophy, because it is extremely useful in unveiling the assumptions that obfuscate the genuine sense of philosophy in the Islamic tradition. Richard Walzer, the prominent scholar of the transmission of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world, maintains that Islamic philosophy continued and preserved the Greek philosophical discourse. Walzer's "Islamic philosophers" drew upon the

translated Greek philosophical texts and composed works that were a fusion of the views of their Greek predecessors. For him, it seems that genuine philosophy ultimately advances original theses in "rational terms" about relevant topics, and he is adamant that no such original thesis is to be found in the works of Islamic Philosophers. In the case of Abu Nasr al-Farabi (Alfarabi d. 950 CE), for instance, Walzer maintains that the latter's theory of prophecy contains an original synthesis of Greek views on "imitation" and imagination, but he cannot help arguing, "I have not been able to find precise evidence for it in extant Greek tests although it is obviously of Greek origin."[10] Oliver Leaman is correct to diagnose a trace of Orientalism in Walzer's views.[11] Drawing upon Edward Said's influential work, Leaman argues that Walzer's reading is influenced by a colonialist agenda. Orientalists, that is, scholars under the influence of the colonialist program, promote the colonialist agenda by arguing for the superiority of the culture of the colonizer. "Implicit in the Orientalist attitude, therefore, is the belief that the Orient had passed its golden age as the west was being born, and was thus in decline."[12] I find Leaman's diagnosis plausible, but surely, this is not the only Orientalist assumption exhibited in Walzer's approach. Not only are the so-called Orientals currently in decline, but their golden age was not also anything other than an imitation of the Greek original.

It should also be pointed out that philosophical Orientalism is itself premised on the view that philosophy is the production of rational and systematic treatises. Walzer's Greeks take the credit for the conception of philosophy as the production of rational systems and the later Europeans are credited for advancing it. Muslims, in this picture, play the role of transmitters, who lacked the rational prowess and the requisite creativity to build upon it. His philosophical Orientalism in conjunction with his commitment to the account of philosophy as philosophical discourse blinds him to the ways the Muslim philosophers sought to reconcile ancient Greek philosophical practices with their own religious commitments and exercises. As a result, Islamic philosophy is construed as a mere repository of ancient theories in order to preserve them for the later Europeans.[13]

Leaman diagnoses another manifestation of Orientalism in the position advanced by some scholars of Islamic philosophy, principally Leo Strauss, that "Islamic philosophers were not good Muslims, as philosophy and religion could not be reconciled."[14] Strauss, in *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* attributes the "collapse" of philosophy in the Jewish and the Islamic traditions to the conflict between reason and religious practice. He argues that philosophy prospered in the West precisely because Christian theology, the rational defense of Christian dogma, allowed philosophical discourse an important role in the education of clerics.[15] The symptoms of Orientalism are also detectable in this account. It is assumed that there was a collapse of rationalism in the East, since the tenets of philosophy are incompatible with those of Islam and Judaism. Consequently, in this view, Jewish

and Islamic traditions of philosophy became disfigured, because philosophers had to conceal Greek philosophical theories in their texts to avoid persecution by the irrational practitioners of faith, who constituted the majority of society. As a result Muslim and Jewish philosophers simply restated what they inherited from the Greeks and their major contribution was developing an art of writing that contained their accounts of Greek philosophy in disguise (so as to avoid persecution).[16]

Strauss' Orientalism, like its counterpart in Walzer, presupposes a notion of philosophy as the production of rational knowledge. The identification of this assumption helps explain more of the details of Strauss's position. Philosophy comes into conflict with religion, in his reading, because it involves rational reflection on the nature of things whereas religion is concerned with practice based on revealed (read impervious to rational scrutiny) doctrines. Perhaps the most striking evidence for his metaphilosophical commitment is his view that philosophy prospered under the protection of Christian theology.[17] According to Hadot, it was precisely under these conditions that philosophy proper was marginalized.

> With the advent of medieval scholasticism, however, we find a clear distinction being drawn between *theologia* and *philosophia*. Theology became conscious of its autonomy *qua* supreme science, while philosophy was emptied of its spiritual exercises which, from now on, were relegated to Christian mysticism and ethics. Reduced to the rank of a "handmaid of theology," philosophy's role was henceforth to furnish theology with conceptual—and hence purely theoretical—material. When, in the modern age, philosophy regained its autonomy, it still retained many features inherited from this medieval conception.[18]

Strauss applauds Christian theology's appropriation of philosophy because he does not see ethics and the practice of spiritual exercises as constitutive of ancient Greek philosophy. For him, philosophy is the manufacturing of rational knowledge and it is under the tutelage of Christian theology that philosophy comes into its own (perhaps for the first time). But even if it does so, unbeknownst to Strauss, it is at the cost changing its essence. It goes without saying that he misses out on the particular character of Islamic philosophy, as a reconciliation of the practice of ancient philosophy and that of Islam.

This approach to Islamic philosophy—relying on the understanding of ancient Greek philosophy as the production of rational discourse, peppered with Orientalism—is not restricted to European and American scholars. The Moroccan Scholar, Muhammad Abed al-Jabri, in *Arab-Islamic Philosophy,* argues that philosophy *qua* production of rational knowledge declined in the Islamic world because of the influence of Persian Gnosticism. For Jabri, Arabic Islam was an ideology "committed to the service of science, progress and a dynamic conception of society."[19] Thus, it embraced Greek

rationalism. However, Persian antirationalism (that is, Gnosticism) gave rise to an assault on the Arabic tradition and resulted in its decline.[20] Implicit in Jabri's argument is a call to unfasten the Gnostic, especially the Shiite, element from the Islamic heritage and facilitate a renaissance of Arabism, which is nothing other than Islam at the service of reason and the European idea of progress. For Jabri, the borders of the Orient have shifted further to the East but the same prejudices are present. Jabri's view is especially awkward because it flies in the face of historical evidence. It is well known that the Persian world encouraged the pursuit of philosophy. The flowering of philosophy in the Safavid dynasty and its cultivation in the Shi'a seminaries to this day testify to the problematic nature of Jabri's account of the nature of philosophy and its history in the Islamic world.

Assigning primacy to the production of rational knowledge in defining the Greek philosophical heritage need not always accompany an Orientalist attitude. A good example of a scholar holding such a view is Leaman. As we have seen, Leaman rejects Orientalism but considers Greek philosophy as "the acme of rationality."[21] For him, "The main purpose of philosophy is to understand arguments, and to assess those arguments and construct new arguments around them."[22] He argues not that Muslims were barbarians and against reason (a favorite assumption of his Orientalist counterparts); rather he maintains that Greek philosophy was challenged by a number of other rational modes of discourse. These included Islamic theology, the theory of language, and jurisprudence, and that these modes of rational discourse had already entered the Islamic cultural scene before philosophy came along. Now this view makes some sense of the resistance offered to philosophy by a theologian and jurist like Ghazali, but it is still problematic because it misses out on the significance of philosophy as a way of life and the Islamic appreciation and appropriation of this significance.[23] So, for Leaman, Islamic philosophy is Islamic just as any other production of rational knowledge in an Islamic context is Islamic: "Perhaps the best way of specifying the nature of Islamic philosophy is to say that it is the tradition of philosophy which arose out of Islamic culture, with the latter term understood in its widest sense."[24] To be fair, Leaman admits that Islamic philosophy, when it comes into its own, "involves study of reality which transforms the soul and is never separated from spiritual purity and religious sanctity."[25] Here, Leaman recognizes the significance of Islamic philosophy as the practice of cultivating and transforming the soul, but he does not see its continuity (in this regard) with the Greek past. As a result, he misses out on what is unique in *Islamic* philosophy, what makes Islamic *philosophy* Islamic.

Perhaps one of the most notable proponents of the view that Islamic philosophy involves the practice of transformative spiritual exercises is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. In "the Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam," Nasr claims that "This conception of philosophy as dealing with the discovering of the truth concerning the nature of things and combining mental

knowledge with the purification and perfection of one's being has lasted to this day wherever the tradition of Islamic philosophy has continued and is in fact embodied in the very being of the most eminent representatives of the Islamic philosophical tradition to this day."[26] He calls the practice of spiritual exercises "the purification and perfection of one's own being" and insists that it is constitutive of Islamic philosophy. Nasr also recognizes that the Greeks, especially the Platonists and Hermetico-Pythagoreans, underscored the relation between the theory and the practice of philosophy.[27] But for him, Peripateticism de-emphasizes this relation and one of the virtues of Islamic philosophy proper is the overcoming of the Peripatetic distortion.[28] For Nasr, the move away from Peripateticism occurs in the later writings of Abu 'Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna d. 1037 CE), especially in what remains of *al-hikma al-mashriqiyya* (Eastern philosophy), in which Avicenna decries the follies of the Peripatetics and declares his commitment to an approach to philosophy that draws from non-Greek sources.[29] Nasr sees in this a revival of perennial wisdom, which involves an alliance between theory and spiritual exercises. He is adamant about the importance of ascetic self-purification and self-discovery for the true notion of philosophy:

> Philosophy [without spiritual exercises] becomes sheer mental acrobatics and reason cut off from both intellect and revelation, nothing but a luciferan instrument leading to dispersion and ultimately dissolution. It must never be forgotten that according to the teachings of *sophia perennis* itself, the discovery of the Truth is essentially the discovery of one's self and ultimately of the Self...and that is the role of philosophy.[30]

Islam, in Nasr's view, is an expression of perennial wisdom as it is essentially an association of theory and practice, truth and spiritual exercises, and *haqiqa* (truth) and *tariqa* (the way). So, according to Nasr, philosophy in the Islamic tradition becomes Islamic when it overcomes the Peripatetic pressures toward pure theory and recognizes the inseparability of truth and spiritual exercises. Nasr then connects Avicenna's Eastern philosophy (*al-hikma al-mashriqiyya*) to the tradition inaugurated by Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi's (d. 1191 CE) *hikmat al-ishraq* (Philosophy of Illumination). In the latter, the cooperation between reason and spiritual practice is central and remains so in the later Islamic philosophical tradition mainly because of Suhrawardi's influence.

Although I agree with Nasr that certain Islamic philosophical traditions (including Suhrawardi's Illuminationism) were based on a rejection of aspects of Peripateticism, it is not correct to claim that the Peripatetics divorced theory from practice.[31] It is likely, as I mentioned earlier, that Aristotle's emphasis on thought thinking itself as the highest activity occasions such a reading of his work and that of his successors. A good dose of Aristotelian ethics, however, can help overcome this reading, as it becomes

apparent that for Aristotle—and the successors who took his texts seriously—the cultivation of the soul and its excellence is presupposed for the life of contemplation. In other words, it is not clear that Nasr appreciates Aristotle's virtue ethics and its centrality in the latter's philosophical heritage.[32] Once we allow Hadot's thesis that all schools of ancient philosophy are focused on the practice of spiritual exercises and that philosophical discourse is only ancillary, then Nasr's assumption that Islamic philosophy becomes Islamic only in establishing a necessary connection between asceticism and theory becomes suspect. My contention is that we have to be more precise and identify the particular *way* in which Islamic philosophers established the assumed connection between theory and spiritual exercises. In what follows, I argue that this connection is established by Islamic prophetology, and that the Islamic Peripatetics were the early proponents of this prophetology.[33]

I submit that it is the prophetology advanced by Muslim philosophers that makes Islamic philosophy Islamic. By prophetology, I mean the philosophical inquiry into what constitutes a prophet as the paradigmatic wise person and man of God. Of course, Islamic prophetology is "philosophical" because it establishes relevant spiritual exercises for the transformation of the soul of the philosopher. However, Islamic philosophical prophetology, *pace* Nasr, is not restricted to the Shi'a (whether Imami or Ismaili), Eastern (Oriental), Sufi, or the Illuminationist traditions; it is also present in the work of Alfarabi and the Peripatetic writings of Avicenna. Moreover, this Peripatetic prophetology is not just a theory. It has an ethical import (drawn from Aristotle's work) that is essential to my point that Islamic prophetic philosophy (including the work of Muslim Peripatetics) is an *Islamization* of philosophy as the practice of spiritual exercises.

In *De Anima,* Aristotle puts forward the notion of a transcendent Active Intellect. He maintains that "mind, as we have described it, is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is the sort of positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours."[34] The Active Intellect or the productive mind (*nous poietikos*) is explained through the contrast with the mind as passive (*pathetikos*), the conforming mind.[35] One comes to the vicinity of the Active Intellect when the ordinary intellect—the conforming mind—is freed of interests and illusions veiling reality; this freedom comes through the acquisition of virtue through spiritual exercises.[36] Virtuous people do not impose contingent meanings upon the objects of cognition but experience them as they are necessarily in themselves. So the conforming intellect in the attempt to approach the Active Intellect allows the potential intelligibles to become actualized. In a way, the Active Intellect produces things, as it shines like light on potential intelligibles and illuminates them. This notion of a separate Active Intellect

becomes an important aspect of the psychology of the Peripatetic predecessors of Islamic philosophy.[37]

Islamic Peripatetics supplement the account of the transcendent Active Intellect given by Aristotle and his Hellenic followers by embracing the Platonic view that what makes things intelligible, their forms, have a separate existence. Aristotle rejected Plato's account of the existence of intelligible objects outside of the domain of the sensible objects of human experience, as well as Plato's claim that knowledge is precisely the intellectual perception of transcendent objects. He maintained that forms do not exist independently of sensible objects, but they can be separated from them in thought.[38] Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi, in his insightful *The Principle of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy,* claims that Islamic philosophers believe in the harmony between the views of Plato and Aristotle and, as a result, they argue "that the mind is constituted by its nature to function in different ways at the same time; being perceptive of intelligible substances on the one hand, and speculative about sensible objects on the other."[39] In other words, the Active Intellect is, for Islamic Peripatetics, not just a paradigm of clear thinking; it is also the Divine Being that infuses the sensible world with intelligibility; it is the giver of forms (*wahib al-suwar, dator formarum*) in the manner of Plato's Demiurge in the *Timaeus.*[40] Therefore, intimacy with the Active Intellect not only means that one possesses a clear perception of sensible objects, but it also implies that one receives forms directly from the source rather than through the sensible intermediaries.

It is not too far-fetched to relate this synthetic (Aristotelian/Platonic) account of intimacy with the Active Intellect to the Islamic notion of prophetic inspiration. A central feature of the Islamic proclamation of faith is the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad is a prophet because he was inspired by the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel, who made him recite the Qur'an in an interval of 23 years. These recitals contain the divine wisdom (*haqiqa*), the divine path (*tariqa*) to reach that wisdom, and the elements of the law (*Shari'a*) for the community of Muslims, literally those who submit to the will of God and His wisdom. Alfarabi's works represent one of the earliest attempts to connect the Islamic notion of prophecy to the Peripatetic account of the perfect man as the intimate of the Active Intellect. In *al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya* (The Political State), Alfarabi identifies the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'al*) with Islam's Angel of Revelation.[41] Walzer, in his commentary on *al-Madina al-Fadila* (On the Perfect State), writes: "To know the true meaning of the Active Intellect is . . . essential, according to al-Farabi, to an adequate understanding of one of the most fundamental Muslim articles of faith, the transmission of eternal truth to mankind through a man of overwhelming mental power—a philosopher-prophet-lawgiver."[42]

Alfarabi's philosopher is one who has set his soul in order and has subjected his thinking to a rigorous examination of ideas (aided by the light

of the Active Intellect). In a treatise titled *The Attainment of Happiness*, Alfarabi distinguishes between true philosophy and its counterfeit. He writes:

> As for mutilated philosophy: the counterfeit philosopher, the vain philosopher, or the false philosopher is the one who sets out to study the theoretical sciences without being prepared for them. For he who sets out to inquire ought to be innately equipped for the theoretical sciences—that is, fulfill the conditions prescribed by Plato in the *Republic:* he should excel in comprehending and conceiving that which is essential...He should by natural disposition disdain the appetites, the dinar, and like. He should be high-minded and avoid what is disgraceful in people. He should be pious, yield easily to goodness and justice, and be stubborn in yielding to evil and injustice. And he should be strongly determined in favor of the right thing.[43]

The cultivation and perfection of character, in a manner continuous with the ancient account of philosophy as the practice of spiritual exercises, constitutes the centerpiece of Alfarabi's notion of true philosophy. For him, the acquisition of justice, the perfection and balance of the soul, paves the way for the intellectual labors of theoretical inquiry. Such a preparation allows the individual to resist extraneous goals and distractions and attend to the problems of thought and action. Theoretical wisdom gets its start from this condition of the soul.

The just person upon engaging in contemplation comes nearer in status to the Active Intellect, the Angel of Revelation. If this nearness is accompanied by a perfected imagination, then the philosopher is also a prophet, a person whose perfected imagination is active and who receives forms from the Active Intellect, the giver of forms, and from the senses. The modification of the imagination by the revelations of the active intellect allows for "prophecy of present and future events and ... prophecy of things divine."[44] This divine creativity has been acquired by transcending the limits of the human intellect, which is merely passive in relation to sensory objects. Furthermore, we should not overlook Alfarabi's insistence that the philosopher-prophet is also a lawgiver, a skillful orator, and knows how to guide people toward the achievement of happiness.[45] The Prophet of Islam, in Alfarabi's account, would be one such person, that is, a philosopher–prophet–lawgiver, and the final one.

Avicenna adopts Alfarabi's strategy of identifying the Active Intellect with Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation. However, he modifies some of the details of Alfarabi's account of prophecy. For Avicenna's philosopher, the acquisition of a just and balanced soul must precede theoretical knowledge and the subsequent possibility of conjunction with and enlightenment by the Active Intellect. In the *Metaphysics of the* Healing (*al-Shifa*), Avicenna sets forth the conditions for the cultivation of the Peripatetic ideal of contemplative intimacy with the Active Intellect. He distinguishes between the rational,

the irascible, and the appetitive parts of the soul and argues that justice, the balance of the various parts of the soul and the sum of their excellence, is the first step toward the achievement of personal perfection.

> Since the Motivating Powers are three—the appetitive, the irascible, and the practical—the virtues consist of three things: (a) moderation in…the appetites…(b) moderation in all the irascible passions…(c) moderation in practical matters. At the head of these virtues stand temperance, courage, and practical wisdom; their sum is justice, which, however, is extraneous to theoretical virtue. But whoever combines theoretical wisdom with justice, is indeed a happy man.[46]

For Avicenna, the acquisition of justice, the excellence and balance of the soul, paves the way for the intellectual labors of theoretical inquiry. Such a preparation allows the individual to resist extraneous goals and distractions and attend to theoretical problems. Theoretical wisdom should get its start from this condition of the soul and its addition to justice culminates in happiness (*sa'ada*). However, beyond the happiness in the coupling of justice and theoretical contemplation is that including the quality of prophecy, which is attained through conjunction with the Active Intellect.[47] The benefits of this conjunction include the acquisition of first principles as well as visions brought about in the perfected imagination.

Avicenna also goes on to distinguish between the prophetic insights of the philosophers and those of the prophets. Prophets—God's chosen Messengers—do not require the mediation of practical and theoretical perfection (as necessary in the case of the philosopher). Prophets receive this immediately from the Active Intellect: "That which becomes completely actual does so without mediation or through mediation, and the first is better. This is the one called prophet and in him degrees of excellence in the realm of material forms culminate."[48] The prophet is God's deputy on earth and benefits from unmediated perfection, happiness, and illumination.

Parviz Morewedge, in "The Logic of Emanationism and Sufism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna)," argues that Avicenna's view of the relation between persons and God differs from that of the connectionists, including Aristotle and Alfarabi. The latter hold that a person can, at best, achieve a connection with God by engaging in the "divine-like" activity of contemplation.[49] Avicenna, however, espouses a different mystical position, according to which the soul, after the death of the body, *unites* with God.[50] Avicenna, as I understand, maintains the Aristotelian connectionist notion in order to account for the insights of philosophers and the revelations of prophets. The union of the person and God, if Morewedge is right, is a postmortem event. It does not conflict with the idea of connection or conjunction (*ittisal*) with the Active Intellect as denoting the experiences of *living* persons. Of course, this is not to deny that the connectionist views (Avicenna's included) do not differ in their details.

Given this peculiarly Islamic philosophy of prophecy, I want to now return to my view of the continuity between Islamic philosophy and Ancient Greek philosophy, seen as the practice of spiritual exercises for the sake of wisdom. The ideal of wisdom, in Islamic Peripateticism, gets articulated as involving some kind of ethical cultivation and growth, culminating in prophetic experiences. Of course, like all good Muslims, Alfarabi and Avicenna do not maintain that they are prophets of the caliber of Prophet Muhammad or that a prophet like Muhammad can emerge in the future. Both Avicenna and Alfarabi, in different ways, distinguish the grandeur of the Muhammadan prophetic experience from what a philosopher might attain. Alfarabi does this by attributing to the prophet a perfected imagination that yields the laws (*Shari'a*) for governing the community, and Avicenna, as we have seen, distinguishes between the qualities of insight bestowed upon the philosopher and the prophet.

It is important to realize that the Islamic Peripatetics, represented by Avicenna and Alfarabi, do not simply strap their philosophical ideal onto the Prophet of Islam. Rather, the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds play a central role in the cultivation and the articulation of their ideal. This is again in accord with their Peripatetic heritage. According to Aristotle, ethical standards are not abstract moral principles (a view prevalent in modern moral philosophy); rather they are given by moral exemplars, the *spoudaios* or *phronimos,* that is, the practically wise person.[51] One way the *phronimos* educates is by inviting adepts to imitate him, and the prophetologies articulated by Avicenna and Alfarabi are Islamic precisely because they preserve the Islamic accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's practices and sayings, as sources of imitation for the spiritual transformation of Muslims. The Qur'an and the Sunna fit into this philosophical framework and provide the relevant features of the concrete exemplar who guides the Muslim seeker of wisdom. Of course, this requires the cultivation of a relevant hermeneutic for getting at the meaning of the Qur'an and the Sunna, and such a hermeneutic is overseen by an instructor who is immersed in the spiritual practices of the religion and who knows the law. Philosophers in the Sufi and the Shi'a traditions accept the words and the deeds of the Prophet and the authority of the jurists (*fuqaha'*), but they also emphasize the importance of a living exemplar, in the figure of an Imam, the deputies of the Imam, and so on. These exemplars live the Islamic life and are in touch with the truth (*haqiqa*) of the religion. They are not full prophets in the sense of the Prophet Muhammad, but just like the accomplished philosopher in the philosophies of Alfarabi and Avicenna, they are privy to the Muhammadan truth and can be exemplars for the faithful.

The writings of Nasr and Henry Corbin[52] are more than adequate in articulating the scope of philosophical prophetology in the traditions of Islamic philosophy. Here, I do not want to restate what they have established in their works. I want to make a case for the Islamic Peripatetics, a case that must at

the outset meet Ghazali's challenge. It is well known that Ghazali accused the Muslim Peripatetics of being heretics on account of their adherence to three specific doctrines. To respond to this challenge, I will draw from the work of the great Andalusian Muslim Peripatetic, Abu al-Walid ibn Rushd (Averroës, d. 1198 CE). In a short work titled *The Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom,* Averroës refutes Ghazali's case against the Islamic Peripatetics by rejecting Ghazali's understanding of philosophy as the production of rational knowledge beholden to the beliefs of its Greek founders. Averroës maintains that philosophy as appropriated by Muslims should rather be understood as a legitimate practice within the constraints of Islam.

In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers,* Ghazali maintains that the Islamic Peripatetics held 20 theses that are false, three of which he considered so grave as to constitute heresy (*kufr*). Already in this account we see that Ghazali is approaching his Peripatetic rivals as heretics because of the theses they advance rather than because of their practices. The problematic theses endorsed by Muslim Peripatetics are (1) God does not know particulars, (2) the world is eternal, and (3) bodies are not resurrected. Ghazali refutes each of these theses in a painstakingly rational way, providing evidence from the Qur'an and other relevant sources. I will not relate the details of Ghazali's arguments but rather show how Averroës, in each instance, diminishes the force of the controversy and presents the philosophers as dealing with the Islamic revelation legitimately, albeit differently from Ghazali.

To begin, Averroës argues that philosophers do not claim that God does not know particulars; they rather claim that He does not know them the way humans do. God knows particulars as their Creator whereas humans know them as a privileged creation of God might know them.[53] In regard to the eternity of the world, Averroës shows that the philosophers agree with Ghazali that there is a God, that God created existent things, and that the world (containing the existent things) extends infinitely into the future. What the dispute concerns is merely the past of the world. Philosophers argue that the world is without a beginning in time, whereas Ghazali disagrees. Averroës argues that the scope of this disagreement is insufficient to constitute heresy and he also introduces Qur'anic verses to defend the Peripatetic view.[54] Finally, as to the resurrection of bodies, Averroës argues that Peripatetic philosophers agree with Ghazali that the soul is immortal and that bodies are resurrected on Judgment Day. The dispute rather turns on the issue of whether the bodies that will be resurrected will be the same material bodies that had perished previously. Islamic Peripatetics argue that "existence comes back only to a likeness of what has perished."[55] More precisely, the resurrected body is identical in its attributes to the perished body, but it is not composed of the same material. Again the point is that the difference in the position of the philosophers and that of Ghazali is insignificant and does not constitute grounds for the condemnation of the former as heretics.[56]

Averroës's engagement in the above dialectical joust with Ghazali aims at mitigating the effects of the latter's attack on the philosophers and is not the substance of his critique of Ghazali. This concerns Ghazali's metaphilosophical assumptions. Averroës distinguishes between three forms of reasoning: rhetorical (*al-qiyas al-khitabi*), dialectical (*al-qiyas al-jadali*), and demonstrative (*al-qiyas al-burhani*). Rhetorical reasoning is the mode of discourse suitable to the public preacher and aims at persuasion by appealing to the audience's imagination and passions. Dialectical reasoning is the preferred method of the theologians, those who explore the truth through rational analysis and argumentation. Demonstrative reasoning, however, is the method of the philosopher, and it is interpretation (*ta'wil*) that gets at the origin (*awwal*) of things, in other words their truth. The first two approaches begin with assumptions shared by and *apparent* to the multitude and then proceed to others based either on persuasive or rational norms. Only the demonstrative method goes beyond appearances and gets at the real:

> God has been gracious to His servants for whom there is no path by means of demonstration—either due to their innate dispositions, their habits, or their lack of facilities for education—by coining for them likenesses (*al-amthal*) and similarities of these [hidden things] and calling them to assent by means of those likenesses, since it is possible for assent to those likenesses to come about by means of the indications shared by all—I mean, the dialectical and the rhetorical. This is the reason for the Law (*al-shar'*) being divided into an apparent sense and an inner sense. For the apparent sense is those likenesses coined for those meanings, and the inner sense is those meanings that reveal themselves only to those adept in demonstration.[57]

Demonstration is the method of getting at the reality of things, but God has provided—by means of revelation—likenesses of the real for those disinclined to engage in the demonstrative method. The Law, which includes the Qur'an and the Sunna, contains the images of the real. Theologians and preachers work on these images without seeking the originals. Philosophers, however, pierce the image and unveil the hidden original (*awwal*) through their certain interpretation (*al-ta'wil al-yaqini*). Averroës refers to the demonstrative *ta'wil* as the art of wisdom (*sin'at al-hikma*),[58] a practice that has something to do with aptitude (*al-fitra*), habit (*al-'ada*), and training (*al-ta'allum*). The articulation of *ta'wil* as an art that has to be cultivated in the person points to the practice of spiritual exercises as constituting the core of philosophy, geared toward molding the character and the mind such that one shuns images and falsehoods and becomes intimate with the source of truth, the Active Intellect. It is here that Averroës's principal criticism of Ghazali's attack on the philosophers comes out. Ghazali, according to Averroës, assesses philosophical theses as if they were theological ones (and harshly at

that). Rather, philosophical principles, according to Averroës, must be examined for their service to the practice of philosophy and the activity of aiming at the original (*ta'wil*).

Averroës's view also suggests that philosophy as *hikma* is aligned with Islam, but Muslim philosophers have the further advantage of working with the Islamic law and practices, and are therefore capable of a more direct insight into the truth. In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence,* a text devoted to a more detailed refutation of Ghazali's attacks on the philosophers, Averroës writes:

> [Islamic Peripatetic philosophers] are of the opinion that a human being has no life in this abode but by means of practical arts, and no life in this abode or in the final abode but by means of theoretical virtues; that neither one of these two is completed or obtained by him but by means of the practical virtues; and that the practical virtues are not firmly established but through cognizance of God (may He be exalted) and magnifying Him by means of devotions set down in the law for them in each and every religion—such as offerings, prayers, invocations, and similar speeches spoken in praise of God (may He be exalted), the angels, and the prophets.[59]

It is evident then that Averroës follows the earlier Muslim Peripatetics in understanding philosophy as a way of life aiming at the cultivation of virtues. Moreover, this cultivation is in accord with the Islamic revelation as containing the truth and the practices leading to this truth in a way appealing to the imagination and the reason of the multitude. The reliance on Islamic law, practices, and beliefs as supplied by the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad makes Averroës and his Peripatetic predecessors Muslims. This is a point that I have explored above in dealing with earlier Peripatetic prophetology. Perhaps it would be appropriate to end this section with Avicenna's Persian quatrain, which he composed on being accused of heresy:

> It is not so easy and trifling to call me a heretic;
> No faith in religion is firmer than mine.
> I am a unique person in the whole world and if I am a heretic,
> Then there is not a single Muslim anywhere in the world.[60]

My aim in this chapter has been to argue that what makes Islamic philosophy Islamic is the philosophical prophetology advanced by its proponents. The first premise in the argument consists of the claim that philosophy as inherited from the Greeks was a way of life rather than a set of rational theories. This premise was established by reference to the scholarship of Hadot. I also surveyed accounts of ancient philosophy given by some prominent scholars of Islamic philosophy and criticized aspects of these accounts as

conflicting with the practical focus of philosophy. The second premise of the argument identifies the elements that constitute the ''Islamicity'' of Islamic philosophy. I argue that the central element of Islamic philosophy was not, *pace* Nasr, the combination of theory and self-transformative spiritual exercises. This combination, as I showed with regard to the first premise, was already present in ancient philosophy. Nasr's view had as a corollary the privileging of the anti-Peripatetic posture of Avicenna's later work and its relation to the Hermetico-Platonic Illuminationism advanced by Suhrawardi. I maintain that the central element making Islamic philosophy Islamic was the notion of Islamic philosophical prophetology and that versions of this prophetology were embraced by Muslim Peripatetics. In order to emphasize the Islamicity of Islamic Peripateticism, I defend this tradition against the charge of heresy brought to it by Ghazali. I argue with Averroës that Ghazali misinterpreted the activity of philosophy (especially that of the Islamic Peripatetics) and that the charge of heresy is misplaced.

NOTES

1. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1995), 269.

2. Ibid., 267.

3. Ibid., 268.

4. Ibid., 264.

5. Ibid., 267–68.

6. Refer to my ''The Sublime Visions of Philosophy: Fundamental Ontology and the Imaginal World'' *Microcosm and Macrocosm,* ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, forthcoming).

7. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 107.

8. I am indebted to Julia Annas's ''Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality,'' in *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1992): 119–136, for the distinction between agent-centered and act-centered perspectives.

9. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* 269.

10. Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 213.

11. Oliver Leaman, ''Orientalism and Islamic Philosophy,'' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* vol. 7 (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1998), 159.

12. Ibid., 158.

13. Another scholar of Islamic philosophy committed to this form of Orientalism is T.J. DeBoer. See his *The History of Philosophy in Islam,* trans. Edward R. Jones (New York: Dover, 1967), 28–30.

14. Leaman, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 158.

15. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19.

16. Oliver Leaman, "Orientalism and Islamic Philosophy," in *History of Islamic Philosophy,* Part II, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 1145.

17. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 19.

18. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 107–108.

19. Muhammed Abed al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Aziz Abbassi (Austin, Texas: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, 1999), 48.

20. Ibid., 49.

21. Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16.

22. Leaman, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 1145.

23. This position echoes the approach that some Indian and Pakistani scholars of Islamic philosophy have adopted. They refer to their subject matter as "Muslim philosophy" since they claim it is cultivated by Muslims and is not Islamic; that is, it is not derived from Islamic sources. An example is M.M. Shariff's *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963–1966).

24. Oliver Leaman, "Concept of Philosophy in Islam," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* vol. 5 (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1998), 6.

25. Ibid., 7.

26. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam," in *History of Islamic Philosophy,* Part I, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 24–25.

27. Ibid., 23.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 22. Nasr admits that before Avicenna, the Ismaili philosophers had gone beyond the Peripatetics in combining philosophical theory and the practice of a virtuous life, see ibid., 23.

30. Quoted by Mehdi Aminrazavi, "The Logic of Orientals: Whose Logic and Which Orient?" in the *Beacon of Knowledge,* ed. Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2003), 48.

31. Dimitri Gutas *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 286–296, is perhaps a good antidote to Nasr's postulate of a radical divide between Avicenna the Peripatetic and Avicenna the Oriental.

32. See for instance his alignment of ethics with the act-centered divine-command principles of the *Shari'a* in "Islamic Philosophy—Reorientation or Re-understanding," in *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), 155.

33. Prophetology assumes a central place in the discussion of Islamic philosophy through the efforts of Henry Corbin [see *History of Islamic Philosophy,* trans. Liadain Sherrard (London, U.K.: Kegan Paul, 1993), 21; see also Nasr's "The Qur'an and Hadith as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy," in *History of Islamic Philosophy,* Part I, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 28 and 38 ftn. 3].

34. Aristotle, "De Anima," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W.D. Ross (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 430a 14–17.

35. Ibid., 430a 25.

36. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 79.

37. Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroës, on Intellect* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford university Press, 1992), 13–14.

38. Aristotle, "De Anima," 427–429.

39. Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 9.

40. Plato, "Timaeus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), 29e–30c.

41. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State,* trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1985), 406.

42. Ibid., 406.

43. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), 80.

44. Al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State,* 225.

45. Ibid., 247.

46. Avicenna, "*Healing*: Metaphysics X," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook,* 110.

47. Ibid.

48. Avicenna, "On the Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of the Prophets' Symbols and Metaphors," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook,* 115.

49. Parviz Morewedge, "The Logic of Emanationism and Sufism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (1972): 7–8.

50. Ibid., 8.

51. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W.D. Ross (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984) 1140a25–28, 1143b21–25.

52. See especially his *History of Islamic Philosophy.*

53. Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. and ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 13.

54. Ibid., 16.

55. Ibid., 46.

56. Ibid., 20–21.

57. Ibid., 19.

58. Ibid., 26.

59. Ibid., 43–44 [The translation is modified at places in keeping with Averroës, *Tahafut al-Tahafut,* trans. and ed. Simon Van Den Bergh (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1954), 539].

60. S.H. Barani, trans. "Ibn Sina and Alberuni," in *Avicenna Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta, Iran Society, 1956), 8 (with certain modifications by S.H. Nasr; refer to his "The Qur'an and *Hadith* as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy," 38 ftn. 2). Mehdi Aminrazavi, in "The Logic of Orientals: Whose Logic and Which Orient?" 48–49, argues against the significance of asceticism in Avicenna's personal life. I disagree with his analysis and refer the reader to Dimitri Gutas' discussion of Avicenna's practices in *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 157–194.

3

Islam for the People: Muslim Men's Voices on Race and Ethnicity in the American Umma

Jamillah A. Karim

American Muslims inherit an Islamic cultural legacy colored by a vast array of ethnic groups. In Marshall G.S. Hodgson's study of the Islamic cultural tradition, he writes that Islam "is unique among the religious traditions for the diversity of the peoples that have embraced it."[1] Similarly, Bernard Lewis writes, "Islam for the first time created a truly universal civilization, extending from Southern Europe to Central Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean to India and China." Within "a common religious culture," Islam brought "peoples as diverse as the Chinese, the Indians, the people of the Middle East and North Africa, black Africans, and white Europeans."[2] Umar Faruq Abd-Allah likens the Islamic cultural legacy to "a brilliant peacock's tail of unity in diversity," extending "from the heart of China to the shores of the Atlantic."[3]

As Islam expanded from shore to shore, every ethnic group added another layer to Islam's vast cultural display, each playing its part in the making of a global Muslim community, or *Umma*. Ideally, the Umma represents an international community of Muslims united across race and ethnicity. New to the international Umma, the American Muslim community marks new possibilities within Islam's 1,400-year-old legacy. Already, its most outstanding feature is its striking ethnic spectrum. The American Muslim population reflects a multiethnic mosaic of African American, Anglo, and Latino converts alongside Arab, Asian, African, and European Muslim immigrants. This distinctive display of "unity in diversity" within the American context makes it an *American Umma*. In this chapter, I present voices of Islam in America, the voices of American Muslims as they struggle to create an American Umma, standing as a model of racial harmony, in a racialized society.

SYMBOLS OF UNITY: MALCOLM X AND THE HAJJ

How can we conceive of unity within Islam's vast ethnic diversity? Scholars of Islam point to the Hajj as the most striking model. During the Hajj, Muslims from around the world arrive at a common destination, Mecca, orienting their hearts and prayers to a common house of worship, the Ka'ba, also known as God's house. In a remarkable way, Mecca, a city isolated between two valleys in an otherwise remote desert, is transformed into a microcosm of the world during the Hajj season. "The pilgrimage," Lewis writes, brings about "a great meeting and mixing of peoples from Asia, Europe, and Africa."[4] Similarly, when Hodgson describes Muslims as a group "moved by a sense of universal Muslim solidarity," he refers to "the great common pilgrimage to Mecca where all nations may meet."[5]

The most vivid and compelling accounts of the Hajj, however, come from the voices of Muslims privileged to experience the Hajj firsthand. In the American context, Malcolm X's (d. 1965) famous "Letter from Mecca" stands as the most acclaimed account. "Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as practiced by people of all colors and races here in this Ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad and all other prophets of the Holy Scriptures," Malcolm X wrote at the conclusion of his pilgrimage. "There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue eyed blonds to black skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same rituals, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and non-white."[6]

Many others have written of the Hajj's display of universal brotherhood; however, Malcolm's account is exceptionally priceless because of his legendary role in the struggle against antiblack racism. On the platform of Black Muslim nationalism, Malcolm X tore down white supremacy with his intensely brilliant words and emerged as a hero for African Americans. The Hajj, the quintessential symbol of Malcolm's move from the NOI (Nation of Islam) to Sunni Islam, made him a universal Muslim hero beyond black America. However, his account of the Hajj's racial harmony reverberates so powerfully because of what he stood for in black America: a defiant spokesman against white racism and a sincere fighter for racial justice.

RACE AND AMERICAN ISLAM

The Autobiography of Malcolm X emerges as a common theme in the conversion stories of many American Muslims, Black, Anglo, and Latino. The prominence of Malcolm's Hajj narrative highlights race as a striking feature of American Islam—American Islam understood as one of multiple

cultural expressions of Islam. Theorizing this multiplicity, Hodgson argues that cultural traditions and dialogues within specific contexts determine Islam's cultural relevance: only as Islam engaged already existing cultural dialogues could it "become significant for cultural life at large." Islam's cultural relevance, and therefore its cultural expression, was as distinct as the cultures to which Islam spread. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, Islam came to be associated with literacy. Through the study of the Qur'an and other Islamic literatures, Muslim Africans became the first literate class in an otherwise oral civilization. Even non-Muslims attended the Qur'an schools in West Africa because "they were the only educational structures available."[7] Similarly, in southern Spain, Islam came to be associated with higher learning, cultural prestige, and lyrical eloquence, primarily through the transmission of Arabic texts, "from the poetical to the philosophical."[8] The semantic richness of Arabic allowed Christians to express what they could not express in Latin and inspired Jews to revive their sacred language and express what they had never expressed before in Hebrew. In contrast, as Islam spread in the eastern regions of the Indian subcontinent along the Bay of Bengal, it came to be associated less with intellectual prosperity than with agricultural prosperity, particularly rice cultivation. There, the rural masses came to identify with Islam through the landholders, primarily religious gentry who were authorized by the ruling Muslims. The landholders established mosques at the center of thriving agrarian-based communities, making Islam a familiar part of a "single Bengali folk-culture."[9]

Islam's relevance and social appeal were manifested in distinct ways. In many societies, race and social equality were not central to the cultural dialogue.[10] In the American context, however, race assumed a central place in the cultural dialogue, and, as demonstrated in the converts' common reference to Malcolm X, Islam has significantly addressed this cultural issue. Islam's concern with issues of race represents a critical aspect in conceptualizing a distinctly American Islam. The NOI, in which Malcolm X was a member for 12 years, played an exceptional role in this regard as it projected Islam as a religion that resisted racism. The NOI made its mission to address racial injustice very clear: it taught that Islam was "the Black Man's" *original* religion, and by accepting the religion, blacks were reclaiming their true, dignified identity. With this message, the Nation of Islam unapologetically challenged racist ideologies intent on establishing blacks as an inferior race.

While the Nation's theological position distinguished it from mainstream Islam, it was responsible for introducing Islam to African Americans, and did so "almost single-handedly."[11] The NOI popularized Islam and gave American Muslims substantial cultural capital, primarily in African American communities. American Muslims acquire cultural capital to the extent that they compellingly present Islam as a cultural asset. American Muslim spokespersons increasingly speak to this challenge. Foremost among them is Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, an Anglo convert admired by his supporters for

his credentials both as an American-trained academic and as a scholar of traditional Islamic sciences. In a 2002 lecture in Chicago, Dr. Abd-Allah challenged his majority second-generation American Muslim audience to make themselves "known [in America] and...to make friends [in America]." American Muslims possess an array of "treasures and knowledge" that can together produce "a creative [Muslim] minority," standing for "justice, equality and good." If "we bring together the best of what is here [in American society] and the best of what we [American Muslims] have, we can create something beautiful."[12]

Offering "something beautiful" to American culture, Dr. Abd-Allah speaks about the possibility of American Muslims furthering their cultural capital. "We must make Islam a home and open doors for the black and the white and the Hispanic and the Native American," he states.[13] His focus on native populations, rather than African, Arab, or Asian immigrants, brings home his message of, "What can Islam do for Americans?" Often he refers to the way in which African American Muslims have already laid the foundations in this regard. Another important spokesperson, Dr. Sherman A. (Abd al-Hakim) Jackson, lectures specifically about the cultural contribution of the NOI. An African American convert popular among second-generation American Muslims, also trained in both academia and traditional Muslim discourse, Jackson authored the groundbreaking work *Islam and the Blackamerican*. In it, he refers to how Black Muslims created in their larger black communities awareness of the effects of pork consumption and also inspired "the spread of Arabic names."[14] Both are examples of Islam offering something beneficial to non-Muslim Americans.

THE IMMIGRANT DIFFERENCE

Because ethnic diversity and racial harmony are valued as American ideals, the ability for Muslims to substantially challenge and remove racial inequalities would function as an invaluable source of cultural capital. How can American Muslims capitalize upon the legacies of the Nation and Malcolm X, furthering the link between Islam and black empowerment, on the one hand, and that between Islam and racial harmony, on the other? American Muslim communities would have to demonstrate these ideals in their own communities first. The demographics of the American Umma—its significant African American population (at least one-third) and its ethnic diversity—make these ideals appear reachable.[15] But the reality is that race-class (and also ideological) divides limit racial harmony in the American Umma. Interestingly, in the American Umma, the most pronounced lines run not between black and white but between black and immigrant.

The immigrant difference broadens the problem of race in the American Umma, and in ways that Malcolm X did not fully anticipate when he

proclaimed that "Islam is the one religion that will erase the race problem in America." Tellingly if we look back at his "Letter from Mecca," his focus is on black–white relations, and aptly so. When he refers to his *white* "fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white," he states that "their belief in one God had removed the 'white' from their minds, the 'white' from their behavior, and the 'white' from their attitude." His thoughts then turn to "what is happening in America between black and white," and he states, "I do believe, from the experience that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall and many of them will turn to the spiritual path of truth—the only way left to America to ward off the disaster that racism inevitably must lead to."[16]

Malcolm X could speak confidently about Islam as a model for American whites because he had yet to fully experience the ethnic divides in the American Umma, at least not compellingly enough to acknowledge or speak about them in his autobiography. But these divides did exist as early as the 1930s, indicated by Sunni African American Muslims' reports of negative experiences with their immigrant counterparts.[17] In Malcolm's case, however, his membership in the Nation of Islam restricted his relations with Muslim immigrants and as a result, limited his negative encounters with them. As it relates to future race relations in the American Umma, the issue of timing also explains Malcolm's shortened scope. The year of Malcolm X's death was also the year of the 1965 Immigration Act, which overturned a series of U.S. laws that limited Asian immigration. This act marked the largest influx of Muslim immigrants to the United States, particularly from the Indian subcontinent. Before this time, Muslim immigrants had yet to create the level of visibility that made ethnic divisions as obvious as they are today, particularly through the proliferation of ethnic mosques.[18]

Like Malcolm X, American Muslim leaders today speak about Islam as a model of diversity and racial equality; at the same time, however, they criticize American Muslims for their racism. Imam Zaid Shakir, a popular African American scholar who complements his traditional Islamic pedagogy with his expertise in political science, writes that American Muslims "have a unique opportunity to contribute to" ending racism, but "unfortunately, many Muslims have endorsed this disease through their refusal to acknowledge its existence or through their attitudes and actions toward their coreligionists of darker complexions."[19] Here, Imam Zaid alludes to the black–immigrant divide. The historical black–white color line, which Malcolm X addressed, does matter in the American Umma; however, it functions differently in a context that combines African Americans and immigrants.

The immigrant presence in America draws attention to a continuum of privilege, not exclusively characterized by race—black versus white—but broadened to account for "an unspoken U.S. hierarchical social order"[20] in

which whiteness, high income, and quality of education (which includes the ability to speak standard English) work together to locate ethnic groups and subgroups differently along a socioeconomic spectrum. This spectrum illustrates the persistence of the historical color line as it positions rich whites at the top and poor blacks at the bottom. At the same time, it accounts for how other ethnic groups become implicated in "the problem of the color-line"[21] as they attempt to position themselves closer to Anglos along the spectrum of white privilege: "Latinos join Asians and Native Americans as subgroups less privileged than Anglo Americans, though not as underprivileged as African Americans. It is this contest for middle ground that links both Latinos and Asian Americans in an ongoing struggle for recognition."[22]

Among the early Muslim immigrants were some who experienced what it meant to be on the wrong side of the color line, particularly "those whose skin was darker than that of the average American." In the South, they "found that they were treated as 'colored' by local populations and were refused access to public facilities reserved for 'Whites only.' "[23] If we could imagine Jim Crow segregation making Arab and Asian immigrants "bitterly conscious, as [they] never had been before, of [their] brown skin and black hair,"[24] it would come as no surprise that some immigrants would position themselves so as to not be associated with blacks or with their experiences. Vijay Prashad exposes this form of social distancing among South Asian immigrants. "Desis realize they are not 'white,' but there is certainly a strong sense among most desis that they are not 'black.' In a racist society, it is hard to expect people to opt for the most despised category. Desis came to the United States and denied their 'blackness' at least partly out of a desire for class mobility (something, in the main, denied to blacks) and a sense that solidarity with blacks was tantamount to ending one's dreams of being successful (that is, of being 'white')."[25]

This type of social distancing from blacks—especially betrayed by residential patterns in which immigrants choose not to live in black neighborhoods—reflects a common pattern in black–immigrant relations in the larger society. How then would this common trend play out in the American Umma, a community marked as a subset not only of the universal Umma but also of the larger American society? In other words, what does it mean for South Asian and Arab immigrants to find, upon immigrating to the United States, that a substantial part of their new Umma is black? Have shared location in the American Umma created an awareness of the African American experience, support, and solidarity? For the most part, it has not. America's race and class divides extend into the American Umma. Some African American Muslims even contend that the presence of immigrants in the shared Umma presents yet another venue for race discrimination toward African Americans. I present below the voices of Muslim leaders in Chicago as they speak about the way in which race and class inequalities become manifest in the American Umma. I feature Muslim voices as they urge the

next generation of American Muslims to build upon an American Muslim legacy marked by resistance to racism, and the restoration of the African American community in particular. I present a spectrum of voices, primarily male voices, as the American Umma struggles to fulfill Malcolm X's vision. I collected these voices in 2002 as part of research on relations between African American and South Asian immigrant Muslims in Chicago. Chicago has substantial representation of both ethnic Muslim groups. The city holds an unrivalled historical relevance as a major site for early developments within American Islam: Chicago was the headquarters of both the Ahmadiyya and the Nation of Islam, groups with both African American and South Asian roots.[26]

ON ACCOMMODATING RACISM—AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

With an African American population of one million, Chicago remains a very important city for understanding race relations in America. During the Great Migration, Chicago became a major destination for Southern blacks leaving the South to escape the harshness of sharecropping and the horror of lynching. Ever since, Chicago has continued to tell the story of racist residential patterns especially defined by white flight and black ghettos, by quality resources for whites and poverty for blacks: "For every downtown skyscraper that kept jobs and tax dollars in the city, there was a housing project tower that confined poor people in an overcrowded ghetto.... Chicago is one of America's wealthiest cities but, remarkably, nine of the nation's ten poorest census tracts are in Chicago's housing projects."[27] Before they were torn down in 2002, Chicago was the home of the Robert Taylor Homes, a collection of towering high-rise projects built in the 1950s: "Its 4,415 apartments" made "it the largest public housing development in the world." With "fenced-in external galleries," the Robert Taylor Homes were once described as "filing cabinets for the poor."[28]

Abdullah Madyun, an African American Imam in Chicago, was raised in one of Chicago's projects in the late 1960s and 1970s. His parents joined the Nation of Islam when he was a toddler and subsequently followed Imam W.D. Mohammed into mainstream Sunni Islam after abandoning the Nation's black nationalist teachings. (Imam W.D. Mohammed inherited the largest following of African American Muslims when his father, Elijah Muhammad, died in 1975.) Imam Abdullah attended Sister Clara Muhammad School as a boy. He studied in Saudi Arabia in his early twenties, and upon his return, separated himself from the WDM (W.D. Mohammed)[29] community because he disagreed with Imam W.D. Mohammed's religious methodology. Admired in both African American and immigrant communities, Imam Abdullah is known to captivate his

audiences with fiery speeches that reveal an eloquent black vernacular, his words flowing with expressions that reflect his experiences growing up in Black Chicago. He also dazzles his audience with his crisp Arabic, easily citing Qur'anic verse and Hadith. I had met Imam Abdullah two years prior to my research when he spoke to a predominantly South Asian and Arab mosque audience. Never before had I heard an Imam criticize immigrant Muslims who try to hide their religious and ethnic identity to pass as white. Bluntly, he addressed real issues of race and class in the American Umma.

Imam Abdullah's critique of Muslim immigrants sounds very much like Prashad's critique of the Desi American community, the bulk of which, the latter states, has ''moved away from active political struggles toward an accommodation with this racist polity'' in order to ''accumulate economic wealth through hard work and guile.''[30] Imam Abdullah renders an analysis as thorough as Prashad's but in terms that especially convey the cadence of black urban protest. According to Imam Abdullah, Muslim immigrants are ''sinking right away into America's economic, materialistic objective way of life.'' The American ''life'' represents a system that has disadvantaged African Americans, largely on account of race. But this same system gives South Asian immigrants abundant opportunities, Imam Abdullah believes, because ''it helps America's economy to bring engineers and scientists here. They come from impoverished countries, but once here, we pay them good. They spend their wealth on getting the good life. But African Americans do not have the same opportunities, and, of course, it is designed like that.''[31]

While this ''design'' is terribly transparent to Imam Abdullah, he sees South Asian immigrants as being ''clueless'' about it: ''They are clueless about this whole American life, the traps, the plans, the objectives, the system.'' Wali Bashir, an African American Muslim activist and friend of Imam Abdullah, shares similar sentiments. ''The people buying into the American dream,'' Wali said, ''don't realize that the American nightmare is working right under it. The beauty of America is built on the horror underneath. I don't think a lot of them [immigrants] understand this concept. Most of them don't even know our history.''[32] He refers to the over 200 years of labor exploitation, that is, slavery, which made America's advance as a leading industrial nation possible. Whites continue to benefit and blacks continue to lack resources because of the residual capital and liability of slavery.

This reality seems to escape immigrants, as Imam Abdullah states, ''Many of the immigrants think that our condition is because we are lazy. They think, 'All you [African Americans] have to do is do like me. I went to school and such and such.' They really can't see. How can you possibly see the mechanism here to oppress one people, and [think that] you are not a part of it, [that] you get everything that you want and these people don't?''[33] He refers to an overarching system of injustice that connects African Americans and immigrants: ''Why did you leave your country to come here? Why couldn't you do all these great things that you are doing here there? Why did you

break your neck here if it's just that easy?'' Pakistani immigrants come here because Pakistan does not have the same resources and opportunities: ''You left there to come here because there was a condition there. I can't escape the condition here and go to Pakistan.'' In other words, the condition of both Pakistan and black America—connected by a lack of resources and of capital—reflects the inequalities and asymmetries of a global world in which white America comes out on top. Most South Asian immigrants escape the poverty of both Pakistan and black America because they represent the elite of their native countries and can come and acquire wealth here because they are affluent, professional, and closer to white. They live well here, and America ''keeps perpetuating materialism and capitalism all over the world.'' Wali supports Imam Abdullah's analysis, ''Everything we get here has repercussion somewhere else,'' in Pakistan and poor communities in Chicago.

Imam Abdullah argues that as affluent South Asian Muslims perpetuate America's economic order, they compromise their faith. ''Immigrants have come here and have reaped the benefits to the point that it has killed their Islam. You come here for materialism, but you forget that you are Muslim, and you forget your responsibility to establish Allah's *din,*'' interpreting *din* [religion] as the means to justice. ''The immigrants should be putting forth more of an effort to utilize their resources towards the upliftment of the African American community.'' The African American community should be a priority because, according to Imam Abdullah, ''the most prominent spots to establish Allah's *din* are those places where injustices and poverty exist.''

ON ACCOMMODATING RACISM—SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

To Imam Abdullah's remarks on the need to address injustices in African American communities, some Muslims would counter that there do exist other ways of standing up for justice. South Asian Muslims remain connected to Muslims abroad who suffer genocide, warfare, poverty, and global racism. This was the sentiment expressed by Dr. Abidullah Ghazi, a middle-aged South Asian immigrant Muslim who directs IQRA International Educational Foundation, an influential Muslim publishing house in Chicago.

In America, ''there is a Pakistani association, an Indian Muslim association, a Kashmir association, a Bengali association, and they all have their own issues.'' Dr. Ghazi made this point, desiring that critical African American Muslims consider how South Asian Muslims already deal with a range of issues within their communities: ''We are first generation. We did not know America. We did not come here to live. We came here to earn our degree and go back and live happily in our own country. [But one thing led to another], children were born, we settled down, and now we belong to two

worlds. African Americans don't belong to two worlds.'' Although recognizing the African American's symbolic connection to Africa, he noted, ''They are not emotionally involved with what is happening there the way we are when there is nuclear warfare in India and Pakistan, when there is a massacre in Ahmedabad, Gujarat and 7,000 Muslims are killed, when there are floods and calamities in Bengal.'' Even within English-language Pakistani newspapers like *Pakistani Link,* he said, you will find 95 percent Pakistan news and maybe five percent American news yet related to Pakistan. ''Our frame of mind is not America. We are not concerned with what's happening with blacks or whites or the society...as much as we are concerned with what is happening there, and in one's own specific locale. A Bangladeshi doesn't know anything about Pakistan although it was once one country.''[34]

Dr. Ghazi desires that African American Muslims consider these factors ''before coming to a judgment that'' South Asians ''don't care about African Americans.'' He acknowledged that there are individual South Asians who are ''insensitive,'' but ''the real issue and problem is not between the two communities at all. Rather the issue is the American issue: African Americans live in separate neighborhoods; the whites live in separate neighborhoods. The schools, the standard of life, the security do not compare between the inner city and the white neighborhoods.'' Coming to America for a better life and being interested in the best education for their children, South Asians choose to live with affluent whites.

Even as South Asian Muslim immigrants live in majority white neighborhoods, some of them recognize the importance of establishing relations with African Americans. IQRA's main office, for example, sits in an affluent neighborhood on the north side of Chicago. However, the foundation has formed relations with African American Muslims who live on the South Side of Chicago through its active recruitment of writers and designers who represent the diversity of the American Umma. IQRA's commitment to diversity is especially dear to the executive director, Dr. Tasneema Ghazi, Dr. Ghazi's wife. She relishes opportunities to speak about *Grandfather's Orchard,* a children's book written by Dr. Ghazi. Referring to the cover illustration, she states, ''Here you can see the setting is the American South with an African American family. We are trying to include all Muslims, all American Muslims who are of every color and every race.''[35]

Dr. Talat Sultan, the 2004–2005 president of ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) also voiced commitment to good race relations in the American Umma. I interviewed Dr. Sultan in his office where he serves as the principal of the Islamic Foundation School, a predominantly South Asian grade school. Its location in a mosque complex in one of Chicago's north suburbs demonstrates once again the residential patterns that divide African American and South Asian immigrant Muslims. He acknowledged these divides and spoke of South Asians ''harboring the same kinds of prejudices, [though] not to the same level, prevalent in this country.''[36] But this

prejudice against African Americans occurs mostly among *secular* South Asian immigrants, Dr. Sultan told me, "whereas the really good Muslims who practice Islam are friendlier with African Americans." The "good" Muslims "make deliberate efforts to have closer relationships with Afro-Americans. I myself taught at an Afro-American college for 14 years in North Carolina, Barba Scotia College in Concord." It was his first job after completing his degree at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). "I really became part of the family," he said. He paused for one second and then uttered words that fell short of a complete thought but gave his narrative the perfect frame, "This business of black and white in America at that time." Aware of the color line, Dr. Sultan chose to identify with African Americans. With the "feeling of being a minority in this country," it seems that you would want "to identify yourself with minorities. That is more logical to me than pretending to be a white American. Unfortunately, this is how our secular South Asians are."

DA'WA FOR THE PEOPLE—DEBATING CULTURAL CAPITAL

Dr. Sultan links interethnic solidarity with the sincere practice of Islam. However, many African American Muslims would counter that they have experienced racism at the hands of "good" practicing Muslims, and often in immigrant-majority mosques. Many immigrants have maintained their Muslim identity, but this does not necessarily translate into solidarity with African American Muslims. This was the sentiment of Imam Sultan Salahuddin, the Imam of the Ephraim Bahar Cultural Center, an inner-city mosque in association with Imam W.D. Mohammed. Imam Sultan recognizes the efforts of South Asian immigrants to preserve their Muslim identities and build Islamic institutions. Because of their wealth, they surpass African American Muslims in Islamic institution building. But, Imam Sultan believes, they have created Islamic institutions for their self-preservation, not to advance justice in the larger society.

"Their focus is different than ours," Imam Sultan said of South Asian leaders in Chicago.[37] He sees his community's focus as "bringing all humanity the clarity of religion," whereas he does not see South Asian Muslim leaders in Chicago making it a priority to teach Islam as a means of empowering people. He clarified, "I'm not saying that they are not interested in that, but it seems that a lot of them are just trying to fit in the main America: They are trying to show Americans that I'm like you, not terrorists. We don't have to do that. Our history in this country has qualified us whereas they have to constantly prove themselves." His comments suggest different experiences of oppression among American Muslims: South Asians are profiled and treated as terrorists while African Americans are not. However, African Americans

continue to fight race and class injustices in their communities. Their different struggles produce very different types of activist work: "Most of their masjids and homes are in the suburbs, nice and pretty," Imam Sultan said about the neighborhoods of South Asians. "Out there, they don't have to deal with the problems that we have. They don't have to try to save all our people—I don't mean save [literally] because Allah is the only one who makes Muslims—but I mean they don't stay in the community to lend a hand."

The kind of Islamic activism, or cultural capital, to which Imam Sultan refers has roots in the NOI. The strategy of the Nation of Islam, using Islam to improve the general welfare of African American communities at the same time that it gained thousands of converts, best illustrates what I call "*daʿwa* for the people," inviting people to Islam by caring for communities. *Daʿwa* literally means "invitation," understood as invitation to Islam. The Qur'an urges Muslims to invite others to Islam through beautiful and intelligent dialogue.[38] *Daʿwa* represents a shared vision, yet the different contexts in which Muslims carry out this duty, in poor, black neighborhoods or affluent, white suburbs, create boundaries within the Umma.

Geographic location inhibits South Asians from committing to the African American vision of *daʿwa* work, making cooperation with South Asian Muslims frustrating for Imam Sultan. A member of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, which is dominated by South Asians, he recalled his response to an agenda item in one council session to discuss how to better relations with African American Muslims: "The Qur'an has already addressed that, and it really bothers me that they don't know that. It bothers me that they would want us to come way out there to talk about how to help African American Muslims," referring to how the council meetings usually took place in the suburbs, "when our problem is in the inner city, where the majority of Muslims and the people who need help are. The religion of Islam comes to free all humanity, but specifically the oppressed." Hence, Imam Sultan sees *daʿwa* as a form of bringing justice, and helping the oppressed change their state. As Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya wrote, "God has sent His Messengers and revealed His Books so that people may establish *qist* [justice]."[39] If South Asian Muslims were concerned about justice for the oppressed, Imam Sultan believes, they would already have good relations with African American Muslims by working alongside them in the inner city.

Of all the Imams that I interviewed, Imam Abdullah was the most critical of South Asians for their limited *daʿwa* in the inner city. As if to address South Asians, Imam Abdullah asked, "What part have you played in contributing toward this wave of people coming toward Islam?" He noted how all American Muslims like to advertise the fact that "the fastest growing religion in America is Islam," yet it is African Americans who are the ones converting more than any other group. He went further, racializing the issue by framing *daʿwa* within black–white residential divides: "If it was a bunch of white folks converting, then we could say, 'Oh, the immigrants are out there living with

them. They are giving them *da'wa*.'" Yet "white folks aren't coming into this religion like African Americans," Imam Abdullah stated with invincible conviction. "Are African Americans converting because immigrants have utilized their resources and gone into the inner city building masjids and helping them get jobs and opportunities? No! It's not any of that. It's just straight from Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala* [glorified and exalted], guiding the African American to Islam."[40]

Other African American male voices, however, temper Imam Abdullah's criticism as they acknowledge the inner-city *da'wa* work of South Asians. Shakir Lewis, a young Muslim of African American and Anglo background, works at the Reading Room, a *da'wa* center neighboring the Muslim Community Center, which is majority South Asian, on the North Side. Employed by a South Asian immigrant who owns the Reading Room, Shakir recognizes South Asian leaders who specifically encourage work in African American communities. However, he has noticed how South Asians sometimes privilege Anglo converts over African Americans. They believe that "white people will be good for us," meaning that whites will help to enhance the image of Islam in America. But Shakir believes that a *da'wa* movement in white neighborhoods would fail: "I've seen very few white Americans that are receptive to Islam, who don't give you hell for being a Muslim."[41] As for whites who have converted, he insists that they have done very little for establishing Islam in America: "All the real American leaders are either Pakistani or African American, and the greater number are African American: Jamil Al-Amin, Warith Deen Mohammed, Siraj Wahaj, or Malcolm X. Name me any of them who are white."[42] African Americans surpass others, Shakir believes because "they have that fire. They all may not be extremely educated, but their fire usurps the fact that they are not educated." Yet, some South Asians dismiss the value of uneducated African American converts. This disregard becomes especially apparent when South Asians give "less priority" to prison *da'wa* and think that inmates "don't need advanced things about Islam." In the American context, the Islamic concept of *da'wa* takes on meanings of empowerment and restoration for oppressed people. African American Muslims hold this as the highest form of cultural capital and measure how other ethnic Muslims uphold Qur'anic ideals of justice on the basis of the extent to which they pursue *da'wa* "for the people."

INSPIRING CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE NEXT GENERATION

American Muslim activists hope that *da'wa* "for the people" will increasingly become a shared Islamic ethic among the next generations of American Muslims. One group that has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to developing Muslim youth activism is IMAN (literally translated as "faith"),

the Inner City Muslim Action Network. IMAN,[43] established by a group of DePaul University Muslim students in 1995, is known for bringing together Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds (African American, Arab, Anglo American, Latino, South Asian, and others) more than any other organization in the Chicago Umma. Aspiring to alleviate poverty and suffering in Chicago's inner city, IMAN offers to the larger non-Muslim community services ranging from after-school tutoring programs, to computer classes, and a free health clinic. Through its vision—"to see the Muslim community in North America work with others to lead the whole of our society beyond innumerable barriers to social justice and human dignity"—IMAN continues the legacy of using Islam to benefit society.

IMAN's executive director is Rami Nashashibi, a Palestinian American in his late twenties. Never before had I met a second-generation immigrant as passionate about African American issues as he. He is equally passionate about exposing race and class prejudice among immigrants. He is greatly admired in the Chicago Umma, especially among young Muslims. His lectures are brilliant and captivating. His persona embodies ethnic movement and dialogue in the Umma and the determination to inspire others to cross borders. Below, I capture his charisma and passion as he delivers a lecture sponsored by the organization "Muslim Youth of Chicago." His audience consists of first- and second-generation immigrant Muslims

Rami talked about IMAN and the organization's work in the inner city, describing substandard housing and educational resources in low-income African American, Latino, and Arab neighborhoods. "Having never had to live in the projects," he referred to his privilege, but he focused more on the blessing to work in an environment with inner-city Muslims who have "suffered the legacy of racism and oppression and have risen to honorable ranks to inspire" more privileged Muslims to use Islam to transform and enhance their lives.[44]

Rami talked about immigrants and their children finding a place in American society, but place in his terms did not mean finding acceptance among the white majority. Rather it meant raising consciousness about poor communities and doing something about it: "We have a place in America, a place not simply black and white, cut and dry, but a place of active work, *da'wa,* getting involved to do something about your environment." He challenged the mostly immigrant Muslim audience to do something about poverty and racism by uniting with Muslims from different race and class backgrounds: "This is your Umma. It is one Umma. Never underestimate a concept that unites beyond ethnicity, class, and race.... It is a lofty ideal but Muslims have championed this concept for 1400 years." American Muslims commonly refer to themselves as an Umma, he noted, but they fail to live up to the concept: "Post 9/11, we have no more time for slogans. We have to be real about this thing."

He confronted his audience about their love for wealth and how it ''deludes'' and prevents them from helping communities of the poor in America. He reminded them of words of the Prophet Muhammad: ''A man came to the Prophet, *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* [may God bless him and grant him peace], and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, show me an act which if I do it, will cause Allah to love me and people to love me.' He, *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, answered, 'If you distance yourself from the attachment of this world, Allah will love you, and if you prevent yourself from marveling at the possessions of others, you will gain the love of people.''' After suggesting that the pursuit of wealth has cut immigrant Muslims off from the common people, and therefore from ''the love of people,'' he urged his audience to reflect on how the common people have not come to the aid of American Muslims who have suffered discrimination since 9/11. ''In the wake of this travesty, we need to reflect on how noble Muslim charities have been shut down with no murmur, no dissent from the people.'' Muslim charities that aid needy Muslims abroad, particularly refugees of war, were banned by the U.S. government after 9/11, accused of having ties with Al Qaeda. Referring to these Muslim charities, Rami appealed to his audience by addressing issues important to them. Before 9/11, Muslim immigrant dollars heavily supported organizations like Global Relief Foundation, Benevolence International Foundation, and the Holy Land Foundation because they aided poor Muslims ''back home.'' These transnational Umma networks helped to fight injustices against Muslims across the globe.

Rami asked his audience to ask themselves how they expect to gain support from Americans to stop injustices against Muslims around the world when Muslims do nothing for the people here. ''We cannot exist in isolation from our communities. When what you do does not affect the daily lives of people, they are not going to weep for you. Why? Because you do not hit them in their hearts.'' He addressed another central issue for immigrant Muslims: racial profiling post-9/11. He reminded his audience that racial profiling is not new; it represents ''a legacy of 300 years for some people,'' referring to African Americans. Once again, he confronted the self-interests of immigrant Muslims, stating, ''and now [all of sudden, because Muslims have become the newest victims of racial profiling,] we are in an uproar.'' In conclusion, he charged Muslims in America to uphold the values that they claim make Islam the best religion for humanity. ''We cannot afford to be a community of hypocrisy. . . . We have to temper self-righteous attitudes and confront racism in our Umma.''

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIMS SEEK AUTONOMY IN THE AMERICAN UMMA

Much of the focus and critique discussed above has been on immigrants and how they contribute to ethnic divides in the American Umma. African American Muslims, however, also perpetuate divides in the American Umma. ''We are still kind of wrapped up into our thinking that we don't really need to integrate with immigrant communities,'' Imam Abdullah said, critiquing his own ethnic group. ''We have this ethnic solidarity vibe which is an impediment towards trying to fulfill the objective of Islam, cause this is just one brotherhood.''[45] He sees this type of ''vibe'' especially within communities associated with Imam W.D. Mohammed. African American Muslims not associated with the Imam ''are more inclined towards the immigrant communities,'' whereas WDM Muslims ''theoretically say that Muslims are all one,'' but they do not ''push to integrate with the immigrant communities.''

The divide between immigrant and WDM Muslims becomes most visible during the annual Labor Day conventions. Every year, the WDM annual Islamic convention runs concurrently with the national convention of ISNA (Islamic Society of North America), an immigrant-majority group. Five times in the last six years, these conferences have occurred in the same city: Chicago. An article in the Associated Press reported on the 2003 conventions: ''American blacks and immigrant Muslims are holding separate conventions just three miles apart—underscoring the divide between the two groups that Muslim leaders have been struggling to bridge for years.''[46]

''ISNA has tried to have both conventions held under one banner,'' stated Dr. Ghazi. Mentioning how South Asian Muslims hold Imam W.D. Mohammed and other African American leaders in high regard, he continued, ''We prefer that they go and lead us. They *are* our leaders, but there is resistance from the African American community to be a part of the whole.''[47] Yet WDM Imams contend that it is Imam W.D. Mohammed who desires a joint convention while South Asian immigrants continue to perpetuate a tone of authority over African Americans. In other words, they have yet to indicate to WDM Imams that they would uphold the mutual respect and shared authority that a joint project would require. ''He is waiting on them, I believe,'' asserted one WDM Imam. ''The imam has been ready.''[48]

Imam Sultan described immigrant Muslim leaders as generally respecting ''our leader,'' but still underestimating Imam W.D. Mohammed's leadership on how to live Islam in an American context.[49] Imam Sultan questioned how immigrants can ''try to be our leaders'' when African American Muslims carry a longer cultural legacy in the United States. He argued his point with an analogy: ''When I went to Saudi, I didn't try to run nothing over there. What's wrong with them doing the same thing? This is our home.''

Ultimately Imam Sultan believes that they can be a mutual resource as both groups negotiate how to live Islam in America. He acknowledges that immigrants have knowledge to offer African American Muslims but wishes that they would offer it with more humility. At the same time, immigrants should more readily ask, "What can I learn from your community?"

But outside the question of whether different ethnic Muslims can show mutual regard, Chicago leaders see the convention divide reflecting natural cultural differences and different interpretations of Islam. "We play music at our conventions and they think of music as *haram*. We have someone playing piano, someone up there singing. Imam Mohammed once said, 'They have their culture and we have ours, but we can unite in prayer together'." Similarly, Dr. Ghazi recognizes "different issues, different problems, different slang and talking" among African American Muslims when he attends the WDM convention. "I don't feel as at home there as when I go to ISNA." Arabs and Bosnians have their own conventions also, and there, he said, "I also feel as an outsider."

Cultural preferences aside, Dr. Ghazi also senses that many African American Muslims believe that they must establish autonomy and independence as part of acquiring self-dignity. "They have lived in America, they have built America, and they have made a tremendous contribution here. They came under slavery, lynching, and discrimination that's still going on. They fought and they won, and we [Muslim immigrants] came when the society is more open. So they don't want to hear us saying, 'Here is a poor person'." I heard African American Muslim voices that reinforced Dr. Ghazi's position, voices that claimed sole accountability for restoring the economy within their communities. They not only recognize the injustice and disadvantage of their location but also the possibility to build strength from within their location. In my interview with Imam Sultan, we talked about Devon Avenue, a South Asian business district in Chicago. Imam Sultan stressed how "we need to do our own work from our own hands," building a comparable African American Muslim business district in Chicago. "You feel more at home with your own. And it's not that we are not one community [meaning one community with non-black Muslims]. It's just that they have worked and they've got their establishment. We need to work to get our establishment."

I heard a range of perspectives about how to achieve economic justice in African American communities. Conversation shifted between philosophies of self-help and the right to economic resources (that is, reparations). The most compelling arguement for self-help I heard was from Dr. Mikal Ramadan, the Imam of the Taqwa Islamic Center, a WDM mosque on Chicago's southwest side. Dr. Ramadan challenged African American Muslims to build, critiquing WDM Muslims for not meeting the challenge of their leaders. "Where's Chicago's strong business thrust that came out of the legacy of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad? Where's Chicago's

continuation of that effort? Where is it for the believers who have promoted Islam in this city for all those years, under the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and now under the Imam [Imam W.D. Mohammed] in the past 27 years? What is there in Chicago now to show for all of that?''[50] African American Muslims in Chicago should have produced more, given the unique presence of leadership in the city: ''We had the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, we have Jesse Jackson, we have Minister Farrakhan, and we have Imam Warith Deen Muhammad in this city. We had Malcolm in this city. The legacy that we have here, I feel a responsibility from that. Shame on us to have had this, and now to have to say, 'What has been produced from this?'''

Dr. Ramadan does not deny that there has been progress in Chicago's African American communities. ''There's a huge professional, well-off group [of African Americans] in Chicago,'' a large percentage of them moving to the south suburbs. He critiqued the African American middle-class to which he belongs but not for their choice of residence. ''It's natural for people to move. It's why people move to America, for better opportunities. So I don't fault them for doing that.'' Rather the fault comes when they do not go back into their former communities and ''build bridges so that others can do better.'' Thus, instead of critiquing professional South Asians, Dr. Ramadan critiques professional African Americans who have forgotten the struggle of the larger community. ''When you think of the [African American] middle class as a group, what are they doing? What are their works? What have they done? What can we point to? What's substantive?'' He feels that their work ''is not easily identified.'' This void, Dr. Ramadan believes, explains Imam Mohammed's emphasis on collective work. ''The Imam has a desire to build a 'New Africa' community, to have some geography, a place that we can point to and say, 'That's where they [African American Muslims] are, over there, and look how well they're doing over there. They're running their own businesses, their own masjid, their own schools. They're an industrial people.' That's what the Imam wants.''

For Dr. Ramadan, the question remains: how will African American Muslims arrive at a New Africa? ''Are we going to ship in people? Are we going to bring African American immigrants from out of town to occupy this place? Who's going to do all these things?'' Of course his answer is that African Americans, Muslims and non-Muslims, must do this, not immigrants. To him, the economic progress of South Asians does not indicate a responsibility to help build African American communities but rather a challenge to African Americans to create their own progress. ''I say, '*Alhamdulillah,* go ahead brothers. Do it.' It challenges us. It's like a runner in a race. You've given us an example and there's no reason why you should not be able to come to our Devon Street in the South Side. Where are the African American Muslim streets? So I'm inspired by it and challenged by it. The key to this is we have not inspired our professional class to do [what South Asian immigrants have done].''

Dr. Ramadan recognizes the ''stronger business and professional class'' among South Asian immigrants. They benefit from the ''selection process'' in immigration policy, and they do not share the ''post-traumatic slavery stress'' in African American communities. But he refuses to let these disparities become an excuse. ''Notwithstanding the challenges, the race is going to go on whether you participate or not. The Imam has said that he wants us to be competitive. We cannot use other folks' feet to stand on, not the White Man's feet, or Pakistanis' or others' to escape doing a job that we as men gotta do for ourselves. This is not [a] racial, radical [position], but [a stance] for individual dignity.'' When asked if privileged South Asian Muslims have a responsibility to help poor African Americans and others, after a careful, hesitant pause, he responded, ''*Zakat*. And if you think any more than that, you become the new beggar.''

Even with the Islamic duty to give *Zakat,* he disapproves of the attitude among African American Muslims who feel that others owe them something. ''The person who feels, 'They owe us,' is somebody who has lost the race and said, 'I am no longer a competitor. I want you to recognize my disability, and I want you to afford me leeway because I'm deficient.' In a few minutes they will be saying, 'You all over there, y'all owe me. Come back here, you can't leave me'.'' Dr. Ramadan believes in the open free market. ''Just make it fair. Make it close to fair for me, close to fair, and by the help of my God, I'll show you what I can do.'' With this attitude, Dr. Ramadan believes that African Americans could be the ones providing resources. ''Are you asking for charity? Why aren't you giving them charity? Many of them have nothing when they hit these shores, struggling to get a foothold in America. We should be helping them as travelers to the new shores. How does it look? They are hitting the shores, paddling into the mainstream with a fury, and leaving us in the backwater.''

As equal competitors, Dr. Ramadan believes that African American and South Asian Muslims can more effectively do cooperative work in the Chicago Umma. He sees African American autonomy as a way of ''cooperating but still realizing responsibility.'' Although Imam Abdullah is more vocal about South Asian responsibility, he also stresses African American responsibility. ''African Americans also have to put themselves in a position of independence so that when they come to the table, they come in a position of strength: 'I come with a million, now you come with a million.' If both are on the same level, then you come with dignity.''[51]

CLAIMING A COMMON HISTORY

Exposed to the discourses presented above, young American Muslims gradually grow more conscious of ethnic divides in their communities. Challenges remain as they seek to bridge these divides, often because they

have yet to develop a substantial context in which to improve intra-Umma relations. One place to start, some suggest, is to claim a common American Muslim history. Conscious of the ways in which our ethnic Muslim histories overlap and sometimes take shape vis-à-vis the other, Muslim youth may develop a greater sense that our future as American Muslims depends on the collective efforts of all ethnic groups in the American Umma to create a fruitful American Muslim experience.

One historical narrative through which African American and South Asian immigrant Muslims can claim a common American Muslim history is the narrative that recounts the beginnings of the Nation of Islam and the legendary Master Farad Muhammad, also known as Fard Muhammad. In July 1930 in Detroit, Master Farad Muhammad began his mission to transform the lives of African Americans. He entered their homes, telling them that he was an Arab from Mecca sent by God to redeem His chosen people.[52] He revealed to his listeners that "African Americans were of the lost, but finally found Nation of Islam, the tribe of Shabazz that had been stolen by the 'Caucasian cave man' or the 'blond blue-eyed devil' and brought as slaves to 'the wilderness of North America.'"[53] Although Master Farad's true identity had been shrouded in mystery, recent historians and experts, including Imam W.D. Mohammed, confirm his South Asian roots.[54]

In 1931, Elijah Poole, a poor migrant from Sandersville, Georgia, attended one of Master Farad's meetings in Detroit. Elijah immediately accepted his teachings and developed a special relationship with Master Farad. After three and a half years of intense instruction and intimacy with Elijah Poole, Master Farad mysteriously departed in 1934. Before his departure, he gave Elijah the name Muhammad.[55] With only a third-grade education, Elijah Muhammad remarkably spread Master Farad's black nationalist teachings to poor blacks in the inner city. It was through this South Asian and African American encounter that America and the world would come to know the most powerful and sustainable black nationalist movement in history, the Nation of Islam.

Growing up as the daughter of former Nation members, I claimed this history. I always enjoyed hearing my parents and community members tell their Nation stories, stories about baking bean pies and whole wheat rolls, about sewing Nation uniforms and bow ties, about selling *Muhammad Speaks* and fish on black street corners, and about hearing the Honorable Elijah Muhammad or Malcolm X speak. What strikes me now is how a South Asian migration narrative, crisscrossing generations of black nationalist aspiration, set in motion some of the most important moments and people in black history. Unexpectedly I discovered American black history reaching back not only to West Africa but also to the Punjab, the birthplace of Master Farad (according to one report),[56] because transmitting the stories of Clara Muhammad,[57] Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Imam W.D. Mohammed means telling the story of Master Farad.

Unexpectedly, during my research in Chicago, I also discovered South Asian Muslim men sharing in the collective storytelling of NOI history. One of my favorite moments hearing NOI accounts from a South Asian man occurred in an interview with Dr. Ghazi who shared personal stories about his encounter with Elijah Muhammad. To hear stories from a South Asian man that I had imagined only African Americans could tell made me feel as though I had uncovered parts of history that had yet to be told.

It was in 1968 that Dr. Ghazi visited Chicago to attend a Muslim conference. He was determined to see Elijah Muhammad. Dr. Ghazi's friends told him that he was crazy, that he would have to go into a "very dangerous neighborhood." But he told them, "A false prophet doesn't come every day. I just want a glimpse of him." He arrived at Elijah Muhammad's house where he was met by Fruit of Islam body guards. They told him, "The Messenger is speaking to the ladies, come back tomorrow." Dr. Ghazi came back with five other men. All of them were escorted in to sit at the table with Elijah Muhammad. After their meal, Dr. Ghazi asked Elijah Muhammad a series of questions that challenged his teachings. "Islam doesn't distinguish between black and white so how come you say that blacks will receive salvation and whites be condemned?" He recalled Elijah Muhammad's answer: "When God made the dough to make the human being, the devil urinated, and the urine went into part of the dough, so God separated the impure part out to make the white people, and then the black people he made from the pure part.... The nature of the white person is the devil because of those impurities. Any white person who accepts Islam, he acts against his own nature. He can be Muslim, he can be saved, but it's not his nature. The black person, if he is not a Muslim, he's going against his nature. The black person has to be Muslim so I'm bringing the black person back to his true nature."

How often has Dr. Ghazi shared his NOI stories? Did he tell them for the first time because I appeared interested as an African American Muslim researcher? Or had he passed these stories to his daughter as my parents had to me? Whatever the case because of Islam, South Asian migration narratives emerge inextricably linked to African American history, a history that not only African Americans claim and transmit but also South Asians claim. It is a line of transmission threading a narrative through and between ethnic communities.

CONCLUSION

The voices that I have recorded above demonstrate the diversity of the American Umma. Competing with each other at the same time that they complement each other, these voices represent the making of a distinctively American Islam, the pursuit for racial justice reverberating at its core. Committed to the Umma ideal to overcome race and ethnic divides, these

voices inherit a time-honored Islamic cultural dialogue at the same that they contribute something new. As Rami articulated most eloquently, ''It is a lofty ideal'' but one ''that Muslims have championed'' for over 1,400 years. Their voices do not represent all in the American Umma and certainly not the voices of American Muslim women. Nonetheless, they provide a window onto understanding the role of race and ethnicity in forging a new chapter in Islam's vast cultural history. Challenges remain for the next generation of American Muslims. Yet the greater the challenge, the more celebrated their commitment and creativity in making Islam a benefit for all American people, Muslim and non-Muslims, black, white, and immigrant.

NOTES

1. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization,* vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 75.

2. Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East : An Historical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 18.

3. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, ''Islam and the Cultural Imperative,'' http://www.nawawi.org/downloads/article3.pdf, 2004.

4. Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East,* 18.

5. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 78.

6. Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 371.

7. Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah : African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 7.

8. Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World : How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 2002), 75.

9. Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760,* Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies 17 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), 280–281.

10. Richard Eaton states that the emphasis on social equality in Islam is a product of contemporary reform movements. Persian primary sources show that in introducing Islam to Indians, ''Muslim intellectuals did not stress the Islamic ideal of social equality as opposed to Hindu caste, but rather Islamic monotheism as opposed to Hindu polytheism.'' Richard M. Eaton, ''Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India,'' in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. R.C. Martin (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 110.

11. Claude Andrew Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad,* 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 282.

12. Author's notes, 13 August 2002.

13. Author's notes, 11 August 2002.

14. Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47.

15. A 1999 study put South Asians at 29.3 percent, Arabs at 32.7 percent, and African Americans at 29.9 percent of the U. S. Muslim population. Fareed Nu'man, *The Muslim Population in the United States: A Brief Statement* (Washington, D.C.: American Muslim Council, 1992). A 1992 study put African Americans at 42 percent, Arabs at 12.4 percent, and South Asians at 24.4 percent. Ilyas Ba-Yanus and Moin Siddiqui, *A Report on the Muslim Population in the United States* (New York: Center for American Muslim Research and Information, 1999).

16. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* 371.

17. Dannin describes how corrupt Ahmadiyya leaders exploited their African American followers by raising membership dues so that immigrant leaders could make trips to India and Mecca. Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (Oxford, U.K.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39. Dannin's is the most thorough work on early African American and immigrant encounters and tensions.

18. The concept of the "ethnic mosque" was theorized in a seminal work in the field of American Muslim studies: Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Adair T. Lummis, *Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

19. Zaid Shakir, "Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, and Blackness," *Seasons: Semiannual Journal of Zaytuna Institute* 2, no. 2 (2005): 76.

20. Bruce B. Lawrence, *New Faiths, Old Fears: Muslims and Other Asian Immigrants in American Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

21. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Bantam classic ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 1.

22. Lawrence, *New Faiths, Old Fears,* 39.

23. Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America,* Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 55.

24. Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), 81.

25. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 94.

26. See Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam.*

27. Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation,* 1st ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 2000), 11–12.

28. Ibid., 184.

29. I invented the acronym WDM to designate the community and followers of Imam W.D. Mohammed. During the period of my research in Chicago in 2002, his community was named the Muslim American Society (MAS). In the fall of 2002, Imam W.D. Mohammed changed the name from Muslim American Society because an immigrant group also used this name, and he wanted to distinguish his community. He replaced MAS with ASM, the American Society of Muslims. In September 2003, Imam Mohammed resigned from the ASM to commit to other service and business projects and founded TMC, The Mosque Cares, based in Chicago. Because of the constant name changes and the unclear status of the ASM and its relationship

with TMC, I refer to communities and Muslims who affiliate with Imam Mohammed as WDM for consistency. Also, African American Muslims both under and outside of his leadership often refer to his following as Warith Deen Muslims. Previous names include World Community of Islam in the West, the American Muslim Mission, and the Muslim American Society.

30. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk,* 101–102.

31. Abdullah Madyun, interview with author, 29 May 2002, Chicago, Illinois.

32. Wali Bashir (pseudonym), interview with author, 10 July 2002, Chicago, Illinois.

33. Abdullah Madyun, interview with author, 29 May 2002, Chicago, Illinois.

34. Abidullah Ghazi, interview with author, 26 August 2002, Skokie, Illinois.

35. "Abidullah and Tasneema Ghazi," http://www.chicagohistory.org/global/ghazi.html. While this quotation is taken from an online interview with the Ghazis, Dr. Tasneema also talked excitedly about the book in a personal interview with the author.

36. Talat Sultan, interview with author, 9 September 2002, Villa Park, Illinois.

37. Sultan Salahuddin, interview with author, 10 May 2002, Chicago, Illinois.

38. "Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best who have strayed from His Path and who receive guidance" (Qur'an 16:125).

39. Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, U.K.; Rockport, Massachusetts: Oneworld, 1997), 103.

40. Madyun, interview with author.

41. Shakir Lewis (pseudonym), interview with author, 11 June 2002, Chicago, Illinois.

42. Shakir ignores Hamza Yusuf, a prominent Anglo American Muslim leader, because he disagrees with Yusuf's ideology.

43. For more on IMAN, especially its formation, see Garbi Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2004).

44. Author's notes, 6 April 2002.

45. Madyun, interview with author.

46. *The Herald Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), 28 August 2003.

47. Ghazi, interview with author.

48. Author's notes, 17 June 2002.

49. Salahuddin, interview with author.

50. Mikal Ramadan, interview with author, 6 September 2002, Chicago.

51. Abdullah Madyun, interview with author, 29 May 2002, Chicago, Illinois.

52. C. Eric Lincoln, the foremost authority on the Nation of Islam, discusses the import of the timing of W.D. Fard's appearance in the 1930s, the period of both the Great Depression and the Great Migration, as it relates to the Nation of Islam's early success among the underprivileged classes. C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1994), 11–15, 20–21.

53. Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), 51.

54. The *Muslim Journal,* the official WDM newspaper, has published articles on both Master Farad (d. 1992) and his wife (d. 2004). Photos of both also confirm their South Asian identity. See *Muslim Journal,* 7 March 2003, and *Muslim Journal,* 19 March 2004. A number of theories have surfaced regarding the identity of Master Farad Muhammad. See Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 397–417; Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam,* 50–54; Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition From Separatism to Islam, 1930–1980* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 106–107; Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997), 163–166. Evanzz gives the most thorough account. The ethnic identity he ascribes to Farad Muhammad conforms with Imam W.D. Mohammed's description of him as South Asian.

55. For more information on the development of Elijah Muhammad's relationship with W.D. Farad Muhammad, see Hatim Sahib, ''The Nation of Islam'' (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1951), 65–98, 118–150, and Clegg, *An Original Man,* 14–40.

56. *Muslim Journal,* 7 March 2003.

57. Clara Mohammed was the first to hear Master Farad speak and then she inspired her husband Elijah Muhammad to attend his next meeting. See Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 145.

4

Islam in the African American Experience

Aminah Beverly McCloud

Everywhere in America, especially since September 11, 2001, eyes have been focused on Islam and Muslims in the United States. Those ''eyes'' have also been trained to see Islam as a religion ''over there'' and its adherents, immigrants and their children, as its representatives. Political pundits, journalists, members of the press and Congress, teachers, and heads of corporations—almost every courier of information—understand that Islam is a Middle Eastern religion that threatens America and that immigrants have brought a toxin to American shores. African American Muslims are not a part of this conversation. In response to media claims about Islam and Muslims, many immigrant Muslims and their children deny the assertions of violence but embrace the claim of ownership of American Islam. African American Muslims have not been invited to this conversation either. An astute observer might surmise that there are two—an American Islam in process and a Muslim-world Islam in reformation on American soil.

That significant numbers of black Americans could believe in and be fiercely committed to a religious worldview other than the tradition of Christianity that was forced on them is still hard to fathom for many non-Muslims. As a result of this incredulity, everything about Islam in the black community has been reduced to a protest against racism in one form or another. There are even black historians of black American religious history who state in the twenty-first century that they have little if any knowledge of either black Judaism or Islam. This is incredible but true. The black American Muslim experience continues to be one of a quest for ownership of Islam. This process can be seen in many ways and with several ideological stances. However it is understood, it must be made clear that each position/stance furthers the process toward ownership and is honorable and legitimate. This is critical to any understanding of the black Muslim experience. Readers may have noted that I continue to use ''black'' rather

than African American. Here I am not taking a stand in the name game played on Americans of African descent, rather I am making one small attempt to undo the denigration done after a scholar, C. Eric Lincoln, named members of the Nation of Islam by their color rather than their commitment.[1] While Lincoln's naming was innocent, it opened the door for many researchers to assert that the adjective ''black'' meant that this community was not really Muslim, and thus, every time Islam is mentioned in the community of blacks it is really not Islam but something else such as a protest movement. My choice is to bring voice to these communities of faith and sometimes of protest. However, faith comes first and protest is at best a handmaiden that helps erase the pejorative connotation when it is used.

Thus far, many researchers have overlooked the fact of one process following another in the overarching representation of black people. Until a couple of decades ago, texts on slave religion omitted almost any mention of Islam and African Muslim slaves. One could almost say that many of these texts tended to glorify the transition from an anonymous, quite generic African traditional religion to a blended Christianity. Researchers of Islam in America have cast commitments to Islam in black America as a either ''protest'' or ''failed Christianity'' rather than as an alternative religious experience. Black identity formation is still in process in the twenty-first century. The depictions of black faith commitments in the Christian community should not be taken as normative, even though they have dominated for decades. Many minority cultures around the world face physical erasure. African American Muslims face an intellectual erasure of their history and thus the erasure of their contributions to what is quintessentially theirs, an American Islam.

A particular construction of African American Islam is in play today. I cannot put enough emphasis on the fact that this representation is that of an irrational, illogical ascription to an alternative epistemology as a way to protest American racism. This chapter makes no claims to deconstruct previous representations nor will it attempt to offer more than the skeleton of one potentially viable alternative for describing some of the components of this process. Stated another way, what is intended here is to present one potentially plausible description of the ideas of black Muslims in the process of coming to an ownership of Islam.

I want to look at the function of the discourses of the experiences of black Muslims in an environment in which power relations emerged from chattel slavery. In this story discursive practices are interwoven with social practices. We know that knowledge is governed by power relations, whether the context is slavery or religion. Any factual account of the African American Muslim experience must begin with the arrival of African Muslims kidnapped from their countries. While we must begin here, I am most interested in the possible retention of Islam and the possibility of a more direct link to Islam in the twentieth century. Because this is my concern, I am willing to give some credence to evidence provided of such links. I ask the

reader to have patience with my position as it is only a suggestion of an alternate narrative.

THE AFRICAN MUSLIM EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW WORLD

Slavery was the common experience of Africans in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America. It was a journey from a condition of *sui juris* to chattel slavery in a space of warfare and capture, along with a journey of horror aboard slave ships, beginning a life in enduring struggle to retrieve and resurrect a stolen humanity out of loss. Information on African Muslim slaves is provided mainly by three researchers, Allan D. Austin, Sylvaine A. Diouf, and Michael Gomez.[2] All argue several points: (1) the number of Muslims among the African slaves was significant—numbering in the thousands at least, (2) Muslim slaves were adamant about preserving their religion, (3) some aspects of slave life previously identified as emerging solely from African traditional religions mixing with Christianity are in fact heavily influenced by Islam, (4) Islam itself was a major influence in the process of social stratification within the larger African American society, (5) many of the particulars of Islam, including practices and language were lost over time.

Using these points of fact as markers, we can explore the contours of the experiences of African Muslim slaves, which were intimately tied to those of other African slaves on many levels but are also unique in many ways. African slaves knew slavery as a condition that could be manipulated or not, acquiesced to or not, and removed or not. American chattel slavery was a new kind of slavery in which not only were there no negotiations, but also there were religious justifications regarding skin color. American slaves were deliberately deprived of their heritage, their ability to maintain families, and the outward practice of their religion. This erasure of any claim to humanity gave birth to an ongoing restlessness in the black American community well into the twenty-first century. One significant theme of this restlessness is the segregation of Muslims from other parts of the African American community.

Islamic beliefs and practices, while nurturing the soul of the believer, also separate the individual from those who believe differently on some basic levels. But in the black American community this is a persistent tension as black families are multireligious. For example, modesty is a hallmark of Islam, and thus, the American model of providing few clothes for slaves was untenable for Muslim men who had to be covered from navel to knee. Their response was to wear multiple layers of clothing. Muslims also did not eat pork, the staple of the slave diet. This forced some creativity regarding diets that consisted of other meats such as birds and vegetables and strategic fasting. Prayer in Islam does not require much space or ceremony and is a

solitary affair further separating Muslims from their companions in servitude. That these slaves were Muslim is a fact affirmed by the presence of Islam in the regions of their origins.[3]

Simultaneous to the period of the transatlantic slave trade (sixteenth- early twentieth centuries) was a period of the spread of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Wolof, Mandinka, Sereer, and Fula from Senegambia; Temne, Mende, and Kissi from upper Gambia; and Bights were some of the better-known tribes whose members were kidnapped or sold into slavery. These tribes comprised most of the African Muslim slaves, but not all of them. Many were schooled in Islam and Arabic as shown in Austin's book, which is a collection of Muslim slave autobiographies.[4] These narratives not only demonstrate literacy but also reveal previous intellectual work. Some of these slaves had been Qur'anic teachers and leaders in their communities. Perhaps here we need to make a note of slavery in the Islamic understanding before engaging in a discussion of the presence of Muslims in antebellum America.

Slavery, in all of its varieties, was definitely a known entity before the coming of Islam and most concretely in Qur'anic references to the subject. The Qur'an presumes the existence of slavery and urges manumission and decent treatment. It does not ascribe slavery to the category of God-ascribed inferiority nor does it assign the condition to either the race or the color of a person's skin. Muslim history in various regions bears witness to slavery as a condition that emerges as a result of war, famine, and kidnapping. Yet, slaves could work off their enslavement, have their families buy them out of the situation, or, of course, just remain slaves for generations, as occurred in Mauritania. Slavery in the old world was not designed to strip people of their essence as human beings. This is the understanding of slavery that African Muslim slaves brought with them on the transatlantic passage. Some of the autobiographies that Austin provides attest to this understanding.[5] Additionally, other slaves were aware of the Muslim presence. Gomez asserts: "...many West Africans practicing indigenous religions were nonetheless familiar with and influenced by Islam, having been exposed to Muslim dress, dietary laws, and overall conduct."[6]

Some evidence of Muslims in the slave population is found in runaway slave notices.

> For example, New Orleans' *Moniteur de la Louisiane* called for the return of a runaway from the Hausa nation ("nation Aoussa") in October, 1807. The next month, an auction by Patton and Mossy featured four men and six women "from the Congo, Mandinga, and Hausa nations, in the country eight months, from 11 to 22 years of age."[7]

Interestingly, these researchers (Gomez, Diouf, and Austin) present a challenge to the history that most of us have learned.[8] In many schools, when slavery is taught at all, it is said that slavery totally abolished tribal

connections and that slave masters were clever enough to separate tribal members from each other. Gomez asserts that ''the Anglophone slaveholding society regularly distinguished between the various ethnicities within the African community.''[9] These distinctions are seen in runaway notices and further in the retention of original names. Many Muslim slaves apparently managed to keep portions of their names, which though anglicized are recognizable—Bullaly (Bilali), Bocarrey (Bukhari), or Moosa. The evidence produced by these scholars points to an oversight that results in a partial erasure of our knowledge of this population of slaves. Though there is much speculation about possible reasons for the oversight, the end result is confusion about the reemergence of Muslim communities in the twentieth century.

There are also significant data on the active presence of African Muslim slaves through the 1930s from the Works Progress Administration. This group was commissioned to interview ex-slaves and their families. What they discovered was the retention of many of the basics of Islamic practice such as (the possession of) prayer rugs, prayer beads, veiling, head coverings, Qur'ans, knowledge of dietary laws, and ritualized daily prayer. This treasure trove of retentions provides a reasonable backdrop for black Muslim communities in the twentieth century. African Muslim slaves brought Islam to America and though names and rituals were sometimes lost, Islam as a worldview was not. The separation of Muslims from others and their practices is a theme that runs throughout the presence of Islam in America along with Arabic naming and ritual practices.

BLACK AMERICAN ISLAM

The ''lost-found nation'' of Muslims is in many ways an apt description of much of the experience of black Americans who transition to Islam. In many ways, the experience of black American Muslims in the United States fits this label that Elijah Muhammad assigned to his followers in the Nation of Islam.

Histories of black American Islam usually begin by categorizing black Muslim communities as ''failed Christian communities'' whose major focus is Black Nationalism or that these communities concocted something called Islam out of disenchantment with Christianity. Either version attempts to erase any legitimate claim to Islam by labeling it ''black.'' Yet despite the lack of historical references until relatively recently, urban rumor has for almost a century carried tales of African Muslim slaves, voluminous slave retentions of Islamic customs, and a much more varied history than that found in African American history texts.[10] Due to omission (and perhaps commission on the part of some) the story of Islam in black America has rarely been presented as standing on its own. Instead, researchers have painted a picture of ''racial hatred,'' seedy characters, and intrigue and have expressed incredulity at

claims of authenticity. But this is not the end of the damage. The story of African American Muslims has centered on the story of The Nation of Islam, which has been told as a "failed Christian" story with Black nationalism as its core mission. Scholars have ridiculed the NOI creation story, their desire to separate from whites who kill them, and their demands for freedom and justice.

Other communities of black Muslims (those not in the Nation of Islam) have been relegated to the margins of history or have been ignored, thus affirming a popular though erroneous thesis that all black Americans come to Islam through the Nation of Islam. The majority of black Americans who transition to Islam do so with deliberation and belief in Islam's central tenets and the viability of its disciplines. This brief treatment of black American Islam will offer a different way of understanding the various communities that make a note of a legacy rather than a protest.

By 1700, there were over 50,000 escaped and freed Africans in America.[11] This would lead any investigator to speculate that their progeny multiplied and were able to continue some of their preslavery traditions. Historical records discovered to date do not give a breakdown of country of origin of these free Africans, so we do not know who these men and women were. We do know, however, that not all Africans in America were enslaved. And, while history has focused on eastern seaboard Africans, they lived across the Mississippi in the West too.[12] What we do know from the runaway slave notices is that some slaves were Muslims. We also know that southern states such as South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana had the most numerous plantations and ports of entry. We also affirm that two of the most prominent African American communities to affiliate themselves with Islam in the twentieth century were led by men—Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Mohammad—who came from these regions. I would like to suggest a scenario that is woven around the vagaries of life in the early twentieth century for African Americans and the continuing transmission of knowledge about Islam in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Gomez asserts:

> It is therefore with the children and grandchildren of African-born Muslims that the questions concerning the resilience of Islam take on significance. While it cannot be established with certainty that the progeny were Muslim, the Islamic heritage was certainly there, so individuals bore Muslim names and retained a keen memory of the religious practices of their ancestors.[13]

History texts recount President Abraham Lincoln's freeing of the slaves in 1863, but reality teaches us that in some regions, it took quite some time for that information to be passed along. This lack of communication is remembered in Juneteenth celebrations and is noted in several texts.[14] In a brief review of early black legal history we find that under the Republican Party, Congress passed the 14th Amendment (as part of Reconstruction) in 1866

(ratified in 1868), which extended citizenship to blacks and protected their civil rights. In 1870 the states ratified the 15th Amendment, which prohibited the denial of the right to vote on the basis of race. In 1875 Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which forbade racial discrimination in "inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters and other places of amusement." Between 1861 and 1865, 20 black men were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Southern Democrats, aided by Northern businessmen, ended this period of unusual collaboration with terror. Democrats and groups like the Klu Klux Klan began a reign of terror to keep blacks from the polls and public places and to reinstate a racial divide that lasted for the next 80 years.

This ending of any collaboration between blacks and whites is the beginning of what is known in American history as the "Jim Crow" era, which lasted from 1865 to 1964 with the passage of the nation's second Civil Rights Act. Jim Crow was the system of laws and customs that enforced racial segregation and discrimination throughout the United States. Jim Crow was the name of a character in minstrel shows (in which white performers in blackface used African American stereotypes in their songs and dances); it is not clear how the term came to describe American segregation and discrimination.[15] Nevertheless, this term was widely used and its horrors were widely applied. While this was the social and political arena in which all blacks functioned, there arose the difficulty of what to name the ex-slave population. Rather than just calling them by their names—John or Moosa—whites decided that they must be further distinguished. The first nonderogatory appellation was "African," which was used in the early eighteenth century. This was changed to slave and/or Negro in the 1830s, changed to "colored" after World War II, changed back to "Negro" in the 1950s and early 1960s, changed to "blacks" in late 1960s and early 1970s, changed to "Afro-Americans" in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and finally, though still contentious, changed in the late 1980s to a list of terms—"blacks, blackAmerican or Blackamerican, and African American." Needless to say, naming and identity are still in question as is the relationship of black Americans to Africa.

Gomez postulates that there were several connections between ex-slave communities that continued to practice or at least know something about Islam and leaders of nascent Muslim communities in the twentieth century.[16] This assertion is plausible because there must have been some contact either through cultural lore, and actual meetings of descendents or immigrants. Leaders like Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad have been continually discredited Islamically in a number of ways, the most consistent of which has been that they had no connection to any Islamic retention. Gomez's *Black Crescent* recounts the stories of the Melungeon and the Ishmaelite communities who lived in overlapping territories and whose self-descriptions linked them to an Islamic past. The Ishmaelite community

seems to have had the most direct connection to Islam and certainly, through its members, connects a past Islamic experience to Noble Drew Ali.[17]

I see these broad stances as a tripod of Islamic beginnings in the twentieth century. Other researchers could of course use another rubric but let us explore this paradigm for a moment. This tripod is anchored in an ownership of the Islamic worldview, which can be believed in and practiced with integrity and certainty, and is not dependent on the cultures of other Muslims. By this I mean that there is an inherent legacy, the explanation of a present condition, and a viable way of life in the present and in the future that permit black American Muslims to be independent actors. One leg of the tripod issues from a mixture of available philosophies/worldviews with some form of Islam at the center that black people could know and use to understand their present conditions and give structure to their future. One example (and it is only an example of an approach to embracing Islam) is Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple founded in either 1912 or 1913 and based on the Holy Qur'an of the Moorish Science Temple, Circle Seven. This thin text is an obvious mixture of materials but also possibly a deliberate one.

The religiously fertile era of American history that Noble Drew Ali lived in is filled with contenders for the souls of black folks. In this scenario, let us speculate that even though there are traces of millenarianism, the beginnings of the Social Gospel Movement, and an ever increasing number of itinerant preachers in this movement, Ali was deliberate in his choice of affiliation with Islam rather than Christianity or some other religion.

Ali's synthesis of various approaches to a God-centered universe along with a guide to ethical living and self-sufficiency is one type of milestone in the development of Islam in black America. This version of Islam chose to root itself in a tragic yet rich cultural legacy. The use of the term "Moor" was not as fanciful as many researchers would have us believe. Perhaps its real origin lay in the recountings of Melungeons and Ishmaelites and that some African slaves did indeed come through coastal towns in Morocco. I would question the insistence on "unknowable origins" rather than ascribing to an actor the ability to choose. If we are able to see the Moorish Science Temple as playing its role in an ongoing process that places its roots in a slave past, then we can see a different set of correlates in the development of black American Islam.

Ali's formulation of the ethos of his community—love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice—is directly in line with Islamic values. To assist in surviving the psychological ramifications of namelessness, Ali provided a nationality and a way to build a self-sufficient community in Jim Crow America. In this community first names were retained while surnames, most clearly and directly tied to slavery, were changed to Bey or El. Rather than affirming a name based on skin color or the texture of hair, he planted his community's heritage in Morocco—a place that could be identified on a map. The inheritance of the general contours of Islam coming from slave roots resulted in the

retention of some basic elements without the particulars. For example, Moors prayed facing east three times daily and in a different posture from other Muslims. In addition, they fasted and congregated on Friday and Sunday. Given the nature of work for black Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century, to take off for a few hours on Friday would have guaranteed dismissal. When the South Asian Ahmadiyyah Muslim Movement brought English translations of the Qur'an to the black community, they studied it, adding its contents to their store of knowledge.

The community of the Moorish Science Temple focused its attention on reclaiming and rebuilding family life on the basis of on an Islamic worldview. They spread up and down the East Coast and into the Midwest attracting, it is reported, some 30,000 members over time.

As one leg of a tripod, this community represents one way of claiming a legacy and also one impulse in black America toward owning Islam. As one modern expression of Islam torn from its roots of learning and community, the Moorish Science Temple represents one picture of a reemergent Islam that had to survive in the midst of terror, chaos, and dehumanization. Black people at the turn of the century were herded into colonies and did not have the freedom of movement that many immigrants had. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, in the classic study *Black Metropolis* assert:

> The distinctive thing about the Black Belt is that while other such "colonies" tend to break up with the passage of time, the Negro area becomes increasingly more concentrated.[18]

World War I ushered in a period of austerity and depression. Blacks who had migrated to the Midwest and the Northeast for a "taste of freedom" or at least an absence of reminders of slavery were met with Jim Crow, lynching, and outright hatred. Colony living produced communities of people who relied on each other for survival. Blacks from various regions in the south converged and naturally shared knowledge and experiences.

By the 1920s, Muslims from the Ottoman Empire had emigrated to the United States and white Americans such as Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb had embraced Islam. Muslim immigrants, though not in significant numbers, were in the United States. Among these Muslim immigrants were members of the Ahmadiyyah Movement from India. They were sent as missionaries to America. Though their intended targets for conversion were white Americans, they found their most ardent audience in the black community. This transmission of Islam as a "foreign" worldview forms the second leg of the tripod. This culturally encrusted Islamic worldview cannot be owned; however, it can be rented or leased.

Immigrants and their children own Islam as a worldview that has been in their countries for centuries. Quite naturally, most are only minimally aware of cultural accretions and have little consciousness of the process that gave

them ownership of their religion. Also quite natural is their tendency to see a different manifestation of Islam as illegitimate. While looking closely at the process of ownership of Islam in the Muslim world we can easily see that in modern and contemporary times, much of the ownership was formed in colonial and postcolonial contexts, which gave a special hue to the process. Though they are themselves in a reformation period, immigrants bring their various Islams as the only Islam, often divorced from Islam's basic tenets. What this has meant for many black Muslims is that they can never own Islam as they are often castigated about what they do not know. A first-generation immigrant Muslim child can correct a black third-generation Muslim adult on matters of faith and practice.

Islam, as a foreign religion, is by no means unconnected to the first leg of Islam in the black Muslim experience. Struts (binding straps) connect all the legs and permit individuals and sometimes whole communities to move back and forth from one type of Islam to another even though the legs have roots in different histories. For example, some members of the Moorish Science Temple moved to the Ahmadiyyah community and for varying reasons moved again to other communities or back to the Moorish Science Temple. One prominent reason seems to stem from their search for a worldview that they could own.

Islam as a foreign worldview brought culturally constructed Islam to America with its food, dress, behaviors, and names. The Ahmadis introduced an English translation of the Qur'an, books on worship and practice, Hadith literature, books singling out women as an issue, and books on names. In this leg of the tripod, Islam was only tangentially a slave legacy. Rather, Islam in America was portrayed as the direct result of the efforts of immigrant Muslims and their knowledge. Black Muslims influenced by the Ahmadiyyah opened the First Pittsburgh Mosque in the 1920s where there were formal classes in Arabic and classes on how to pray, the requirements of fasting, and so on. Blacks were encouraged to abandon their names for Arabic and/or Indian names. This leg of the tripod served to separate and isolate black Muslims from both the black community and the Moorish Science Temple, whose efforts at self-sufficiency were rooted in the black community.

However, the Ahmadiyyah Movement opened the world to its black members. Black Muslims ate, prayed, and studied with South Asian Muslims, and sometimes even married them. Many South Asians came to share the horrors of Jim Crow America even though a few claimed Aryan roots as recorded in immigration records. Readers should note that I am not postulating that Muslims in this leg of the tripod did not see Islam as a heritage. What I am saying is that the impetus of this stance is located in a Muslim-world Islam, which has little concern for that legacy.

Whereas the first leg was perhaps self-limiting because of its roots in slavery and new interpretation (to handling new circumstances or new information), the second leg's cultural core demanded constant reinterpretation if only for

the reason of immigration to a non-Muslim land. This reinterpretation, however, could only come from the original cultural core—South Asia but not from its *mawali* (clients)—blacks in the United States. Though blacks can admire the cultures of other Muslims, dress like them, and eat what they eat, each culture in the world that has embraced Islam has done so on its own terms. In this leg there is tension between different cultural needs—an almost irreconcilable dissonance. Muslim-world Islam has little, if any, real understanding of the process of transitioning into Islam from another religious background. Immigrants hail from largely homogenous countries and few have members of other faiths in their families. More important, they did not have the basic, though profound, challenges of changing their worldview in a largely Christian land. There is little, if any, compassion for the tensions that arise from this lack of understanding and refusal to recognize cultural needs.

However, in addition to opening minds to the world outside of America, Muslim-world Islam also opened up the world inside the United States. Precisely because this leg of Islam in America is not rooted in a slave legacy, it attracts whites. Thus, it permits on a limited basis, a rare shared experience between black and white Americans in pursuit of a different way of understanding the world. The presence of this leg in the black community influences not just the other two legs but also the black community in general.

Occupying this second leg of Islam in America, as mentioned previously, is psychologically precarious, as a significant part of the new worldview is not easily accessible nor freely given. In the early twentieth century, learning Arabic was difficult, especially for a black community struggling with English literacy. South Asian cultural norms that are presented as Islamic norms are significantly different from black community norms—women serve, men demand; the worldview has a well-defined hierarchy that is as much, if not more, Indian than it is Islamic. Most African American Muslims who have embraced this stance in the process of owning Islam have never achieved mastery of immigrant Islam. Thus, tensions persist and in many ways presage the existence of the third leg of the tripod.

The third leg of the tripod has as its core a notion of black participation in the creation of the world and its subsequent history. Many scholars have attributed this to a fanciful imagination or a piece of mental pathology directly related to slavery. I must admit that it is no more fanciful than the constructed myth of white superiority. Ownership of Islam in this leg usually begins with a creation story of a glorious and just black nation. This nation either created or encountered whites who in time came to enslave them.[19] The ideology of ownership is built around reclaiming those aspects of culture which lead to recreating a nation with Islam as its worldview. Rebuilding the family is also a priority but is not an end unto itself. Families are rebuilt as a necessity of nation building. Rather than the degradation of slavery, the myth

of a glorious past is used as a catalyst for a viable present. The Nation of Islam is one model of this type of Islam.

This third leg is as critical to the process of owning Islam as the other two. Here the fight for freedom, justice, and equality is extended to critique the Umma (the world community of believers) and to continue a legacy of self-sufficiency in the attempt to further the process of ownership of Islam. Both Muslims and non-Muslims have refused to recognize this process and have tried unsuccessfully to relegate the cultural focus that sits at the core of this thought to the margins. I find this intriguing since the historical trajectory of this stance mimics so much in Muslim history.

Stories that are positive—filled with heroic deeds, compassionate efforts, gifted people, and loving families—are, as we all know, necessary for the psychological health of any community. Many of these stories are orally transmitted within communities. However, those communities that choose to develop into empires such as Rome and the United States, spread their stories beyond their normal boundaries to those they enslave, thus giving them a suprareality. It seems to me that modern scholarship, known for its lack of an *imaginaire,* has relegated the stories of non-Western peoples to legend—such stories can be entertaining but are definitely without merit. Given this set of circumstances, the stories of subjected/enslaved people are portrayed as fanciful myths whose appearance renders anything and anyone associated with them illegitimate. Stories that challenge power are ridiculed as myth and black Muslims who plant their roots in this leg often have to deal with such ridicule.

I am using this metaphorical tripod as an attempt to provide an alternative entry into the African American Muslim experience. If we now look at the trajectory of this process in the latter half of the twentieth century, we can perhaps note some other, often omitted factors.

Black Muslims from the first and third legs were the first Muslims on record who demanded pork-free diets in government spaces, in this case in the prison system in the 1950s. They also forced the recognition of Arabic and other unusual surnames such as Bey, El, and X in that same system. Black Muslims in the second and third legs brought Islam into the public school system in the early 1960s as they refused coeducational gym classes, refused to pledge allegiance to the flag, and demanded pork-free lunches for their children. These Muslims brought Islam into the professions around the same time that they joined the Civil Rights Movement and assisted in opening the door for the immigration of Muslim immigrants.[20] Muslims in the second leg were offered scholarships to study overseas in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Muslims in the first and second legs found their greatest challenges in the American black community which was continually under siege.

These challenges and tensions have only increased in the African American Muslim community and in the immigrant community. Rather than understanding the process any culture embraces when becoming Muslim, many

immigrants and most Americans have relegated black Islam to a corner labeled "antiwhite." There is still at this point little ownership of Islam as many in the black community have either spent much of their effort retrieving Islam from its immigrant presentation or have given themselves over wholly to a cultural Islam. However, this is to be expected in a process that has existed in Islamic history in every culture from Morocco to China.[21]

The African American Muslim experience is still very much in process although it is clearly an American religion. Islam will still be present in America, even if every immigrant takes his or her children back to the ancestral home. The events of September 11, 2001, mark another phase of the process just as did the events at the end of 1979 with the Iranian hostage crisis. Neither African American Christians nor Muslims are players on the world stage and, thus, are not consulted by their white brethren about any of the events of the world. This new phase, however, is beginning to mark a pulling away from the second immigrant leg. Muslims are also not joining the ranks of either the first or the third legs and thus probably are a lot closer in the process of gaining ownership of Islam. In this current phase, black Muslims are questioning not only the immigrant claim to superior Islamic knowledge but also the history of contemporary issues in the Muslim world and how that history relates to their own domestic concerns.

Black Muslims have long noted the presence of Arab Muslim liquor stores in their communities selling both liquor and illegal drugs to the community. They have also taken note of the hypocrisy of representation when on television they see immigrant Muslims smiling for the cameras with government representatives and others who they denigrate in Friday sermons. They realize that immigrant Muslims and their children have little investment in urban ghettos to which black Muslims are committed to change. The black Muslim family life is filled with Jews, Christians, Buddhists, atheists, and agnostics from every part of the ideological spectrum. Some have sided with the Palestinian side of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and have struggled simultaneously with the racism of Palestinians toward black people. The limits of the immigrant capacity to embrace the pluralism or interreligious dialogue that black Muslims advocate is another challenge. The struggle for ownership continues.

This ownership will necessarily include white Muslims, Latino Muslims, immigrant Muslims and their children, but the power relationships will change. Muslim-world Islam will be vetoed by all and what will emerge will reflect a fully Western Islamic expression. Those who fear giving up power will be ignored. The various legs of black American Islam and their primary concerns will syncretize into a dynamic expression of Islam that will display marks of the struggle for ownership.

The slave roots of American Islam will be recognized as will stories that relate the tales of conquest, and the extraordinary feats of heroes along with their tragedies. Hopefully, historians will provide more connections that

strengthen the heritage of blacks in Islam, which will combine with the presence of Muslims whose heritage comes from the Muslim world. We must all stay tuned for the next phase. The intent of this chapter was simply to present another lens from which to view a varied and rich process in the present.

NOTES

1. See C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims of America,* 3rd ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

2. See Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Allan D. Austin, ed., *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook, Critical Studies on Black Life and Culture,* vol. 5 (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1983).

3. Playwright, Julie Dash portrayed this image well in her movie, ‘‘Daughters of the Dusk.’’ Celebrated filmmaker Julie Dash came under the public’s eye in 1991 when her feature film ‘‘Daughters of the Dust’’ won for best cinematography at the Sundance Film Festival.

4. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America.*

5. Ibid.

6. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks,* 68.

7. Ibid.

8. See the film *Amistad* for a visual portrayal of some aspects of the journey and the deliberate efforts made by slaves to not forget who they were.

9. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks,* 68.

10. See Adib Rashad’s *The History of Islam and Black Nationalism in the Americas* (Beltsville, Maryland: Writers’, Inc., 1991).

11. See James Oliver and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham, North Carolina, and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

12. For accounts see: *The Treaty of 1866 of the Five Civilized Tribes,* Claudia Saunt’s *Black White Indian: Race and The Unmaking of a Family;* Tiya Miles’ *The Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*; *Black Seminoles* by Kenneth Wiggins; and *Africans and Seminoles*, by Daniel F. Littlefield.

13. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks,* 81.

14. Ralph Ellison and Charles Johnson, *Juneteenth: A Novel* (Vintage International, 2000); Angela Leeper, *Juneteenth: A Day to Celebrate Freedom from Slavery* (Enslow Publishers, 2004).

15. Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2003. © 1993–2002 Microsoft Corporation.

16. Michael Gomez, *Black Cresent*: *The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2005), 185–214.

17. Ibid.

18. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis,* vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970), 174.

19. See Schuyler's *Black Empire* as one example.

20. This statement does not negate the fact that the United States recruited significant numbers of students and professionals from the Muslim world to fill jobs that Americans were not educated enough to fill in the numbers needed. It adds a perspective.

21. See Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, U.K.: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

5

ISLAM AND GENDER JUSTICE

Ziba Mir-Hosseini

For a century or more, one of the "hottest" areas of debate among Muslims has been the "status of women in Islam."[1] The debate is embedded in the history of polemics between Islam and the West, and the anticolonial and nationalist discourses of the first half of the twentieth century. With the rise of political Islam in the second half of the century, and the Islamist political slogan of "Return to Shari'a," the debate took a new turn and acquired a new dimension. It became part of a larger intellectual and political struggle among Muslims between two understandings of their religion and two ways of reading its sacred texts. One is an absolutist, dogmatic and patriarchal Islam that makes little concession to contemporary realities and the aspirations of Muslims. The other is a democratic, pluralist and rights-based Islam that is making room for these realities and values, including gender equality.

In this chapter I trace the political and textual genealogy of this "rights-based" Islam, and explore its potential for addressing the gender inequalities embedded in prevailing interpretations of the Shari'a. I ask two prime questions: If justice and equality are intrinsic values in Islam, as many contemporary Muslim jurists claim and Muslims believe, why are women treated as second-class citizens in Islamic jurisprudential texts? If equality has become inherent to conceptions of justice in modern times, how can it be reflected in the laws that define the rights of men and women and regulate relations between them in contemporary Muslim societies?

I begin with a note on my own position and conceptual background; then proceed to an examination of notions of gender rights as constructed in classical jurisprudential texts and as debated, deconstructed and reconstructed in the vast twentieth-century literature on "Women in Islam." I end by outlining an emerging gender discourse that is feminist in its aspirations and demands and Islamic in its language and sources of legitimacy.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

I approach these questions not only as a trained legal anthropologist but also as a believing Muslim woman who needs to make sense of her faith and her religious tradition.[2] I believe in the justice of Islam and place my analysis within the tradition of Islamic legal thought by invoking two crucial distinctions in that tradition. These distinctions are made by all Muslim jurists and have been upheld in all schools of Islamic law, but have been distorted and obscured in modern times, when modern nation-states have created uniform legal systems and selectively reformed and codified elements of Islamic family law, and when a new political Islam has emerged that uses Shari'a as an ideology.

The first distinction is between Shari'a, revealed law, and *fiqh,* the science of Islamic jurisprudence.[3] This distinction underlies the emergence of various schools of Islamic law and within them a multiplicity of positions and opinions. Shari'a, literally "the way," in Muslim belief is the totality of God's will as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. *Fiqh,* jurisprudence, literally "understanding," is the process of human endeavor to discern and extract legal rules from the sacred sources of Islam: that is, the Qur'an and the Sunna (the practice of the Prophet, as contained in *Hadith,* Traditions). In other words, while the Shari'a is sacred, eternal, and universal, *fiqh* is human and—like any other system of jurisprudence—mundane, temporal and local.

It is essential to stress this distinction and its epistemological and political ramifications. *Fiqh* is often mistakenly equated with Shari'a, not only in popular Muslim discourses but also by specialists and politicians, and often with ideological intent: that is, what Islamists and others commonly assert to be a "Shari'a mandate" (hence divine and infallible), is in fact the result of *fiqh,* juristic speculation and extrapolation (hence human and fallible). *Fiqh* texts, which are patriarchal in both spirit and form, are frequently invoked as a means to silence and frustrate Muslims' search for this-worldly justice—to which legal justice and equality in law are intrinsic. I contend that patriarchal interpretations of the Shari'a can and must be challenged at the level of *fiqh,* which is nothing more than the human understanding of the divine will—what we are able to understand of the Shari'a in this world at the legal level. In short, it is the distinction between Shari'a and *fiqh* that enables me—as a believing Muslim—to argue for gender justice within the framework of my faith.[4] Throughout this chapter, then, the Shari'a (as contained in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions) is understood as a transcendental ideal that embodies the justice of Islam and the spirit of the Qur'anic revelations; while *fiqh* includes not only the vast corpus of jurisprudential texts but also the positive laws and rulings that Muslim jurists claim to be rooted in the sacred texts.

My second distinction, which I also take from the Islamic legal tradition, is that between the two main categories of legal rulings (*ahkam*): between *'ibadat* (ritual/spiritual acts) and *mu'amalat* (social/contractual acts).

Rulings in the first category, *ʿibadat,* regulate relations between God and the believer, where jurists contend there is limited scope for rationalization, explanation, and change, since they pertain to the spiritual realm and divine mysteries. This is not the case with *muʿamalat,* which regulate relations among humans and remain open to rational considerations and social forces. Since human affairs are in constant change and evolution, there is always a need for new rulings, based on new interpretations of the sacred texts, in line with the changing realities of time and place. This is the very rationale for *ijtihad* (literally, "self-exertion," "endeavor"), which is the jurist's method of finding solutions to new issues in the light of the guidance of revelation.[5]

Most rulings concerning women and gender relations belong to the realm of *muʿamalat,* which means that Muslim jurists consider them social and contractual matters, and thus open to rational considerations. My objective in this chapter is to show that discriminatory rulings on women are the products of juristic reasoning and sociocultural assumptions about the nature of relations between men and women. In other words, they are "man-made" juristic constructs, which are shaped by, reflect, and change with the reality on the ground.

There are three interconnected elements to my argument. First, assumptions about gender in Islam—as in any other religion—are necessarily social/cultural constructions, thus historically changing and subject to negotiation. The idea of gender equality is among the "newly created issues" (*masa'il mustahdatha*), to use a *fiqh* idiom; that it is to say, it was not an issue that concerned premodern jurists as it was not part of their social experience. Second, Islamic legal traditions do not contain one concept of gender, but rather a variety of inconsistent concepts, each resting on different theological, juristic, social and sexual assumptions and theories. This, in part, reflects a tension in Islam's sacred texts between ethical egalitarianism as an essential part of its message and the patriarchal context in which this message was unfolded and implemented.[6] This tension enables both proponents and opponents of gender equality to claim textual legitimacy for their respective positions and gender ideologies.[7] Third, gender rights as constructed in classical *fiqh*—and reproduced in dominant contemporary discourses—are neither tenable under contemporary conditions nor defensible on Islamic grounds; not only are they contrary to the egalitarian spirit of Islam, but they are also now being used to deny women justice and dignified choices in life.

GENDER IN CLASSICAL *FIQH*

In classical *fiqh* texts, gender inequality is taken for granted, a priori, as a principle. It reflects the world in which their authors lived, a world in which inequality between men and women was the natural order of things, the only way to regulate relations between them. Biology is destiny: a woman is

created to bear and rear children; this is her primary role and her most important contribution to society. The notion of "women's rights"—as we mean it today—has no place and little relevance in the world of these texts.

The classical *fiqh* notion of gender is encapsulated in two sets of rulings: those that define marriage and divorce, on the one hand, and women's covering and seclusion, on the other hand. Not only do they contain the core of the patriarchal logic, but they should be seen as two sides of the same coin: they deny women choice or voice, restraining them in the public domain by veiling and seclusion, and subjugating them in private through family law. These rulings legitimated and institutionalized the control and subjugation of women throughout the history of the Muslim world, and continue to do so in modern times. In these matters, the various *fiqh* schools all share the same inner logic and patriarchal conception. If they differ, it is in the manner and extent to which they have translated this conception into legal rules.[8] An examination of these rulings can tell us something of the genesis of gender inequality in the Islamic legal tradition, which, as we shall see, is rooted in the social, cultural, and political conditions within which Islam's sacred texts were understood and turned into law.

Marriage: Union or Dominion?

Marriage, as defined by classical jurists, is a contract of exchange whose prime purpose is to render sexual relations between a man and a woman licit. Patterned after the contract of sale, which served as a model for most contracts in Islamic jurisprudence, it has three essential elements: the offer (*ijab*) by the woman or her guardian (*wali*), the acceptance (*qabul*) by the man, and the payment of dower (*mahr*), a sum of money or any valuable that the husband pays or undertakes to pay to the bride before or after consummation.

The marriage contract is called *ʿaqd al-nikah* (literally "contract of coitus"). In discussing its legal structure and effects, classical jurists often used the analogy of the contract of sale and alluded to parallels between the status of wives and female slaves, to whose sexual services husbands/owners were entitled, and who were deprived of freedom of movement. Ghazali, the great twelfth-century Muslim theologian, in his monumental work *Revival of the Religious Sciences,* devoted a book to marriage, where he echoed the prevalent view of his time:

> It is enough to say that marriage is a kind of slavery, for a wife is a slave to her husband. She owes her husband absolute obedience in whatever he may demand of her, where she herself is concerned, as long as no sin is involved.[9]

Likewise, Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, the renowned thirteenth-century Shiʿa jurist, wrote:

> Marriage etymologically is uniting one thing with another thing; it is also said to mean coitus and to mean sexual intercourse…it has been said that it is a contract whose object is that of dominion over the vagina, without the right of its possession. It has also been said that it is a verbal contract that first establishes the right to sexual intercourse, that is to say: it is not like buying a female slave when the man acquires the right of intercourse as a consequence of the possession of the slave.[10]

Khalil ibn Ishaq, the prominent fourteenth-century Maliki jurist, was equally explicit when it came to dower and its function in marriage:

> When a woman marries, she sells a part of her person. In the market one buys merchandise, in marriage the husband buys the genital *arvum mulieris*. As in any other bargain and sale, only useful and ritually clean objects may be given in dower.[11]

I am not suggesting that classical jurists conceptualized marriage as either a sale or slavery.[12] Certainly there were significant differences and disagreements about this among the schools, and debates within each school, with legal and practical implications.[13] Even statements such as those quoted above distinguish between the right of access to the woman's sexual and reproductive faculties (which her husband acquires) and the right over her person (which he does not). Rather, what I want to communicate is that the logic of sale underlies the *fiqh*-based conception of marriage and defines the parameters of laws and practices, where a woman's sexuality, if not her person, becomes a commodity, an object of exchange. It is also this logic, as we shall see, that defines the rights and duties of each spouse in marriage and in Ghazali's words makes marriage like slavery for women.

Aware of possible misunderstandings, classical jurists were careful to stress that marriage resembles sale only in form, not in spirit, and drew a clear line between free and slave women in terms of rights and status.[14] They spoke of marriage as a religious duty, lauded its religious merit, and enumerated the ethical injunctions that the contract entailed for the spouses. But these ethical injunctions were eclipsed by those elements in the contract that concerned the exchange and sanctioned men's control over women's sexuality. What jurists defined as the prime "purposes of marriage" separated the legal from the moral in marriage; their consensus held these purposes to be: the gratification of sexual needs, procreation, and the preservation of morality.[15] Whatever served or followed from these purposes became compulsory duties incumbent on each spouse, which the jurists discussed under *ahkam al-zawaj* (laws of matrimony). The rest, though still morally incumbent, remained legally unenforceable and were left to the conscience of individuals.

For each party, the contract entails a set of defined rights and obligations, some with moral sanction and others with legal force. Those with legal force

revolve around the twin themes of sexual access and compensation, embodied in the two concepts *tamkin* (access; also *ta'a*, obedience) and *nafaqa* (maintenance). *Tamkin*, defined in terms of sexual submission, is a man's right and thus a woman's duty; whereas *nafaqa*, defined as shelter, food, and clothing, is a woman's right and a man's duty. A woman becomes entitled to *nafaqa* only after consummation of the marriage, and she loses her claim if she is in a state of *nushuz* (disobedience). There is no matrimonial regime: the husband is the sole owner of the matrimonial resources, and the wife remains the possessor of her dower and whatever she brings to or earns during the marriage. She has no legal duty to do housework and is entitled to demand wages if she does. The procreation of children is the only area the spouses share, but even here a wife is not legally required to suckle her child and can demand compensation if she does.

Among the default rights of the husband is his power to control his wife's movements and her "excess piety." She needs his permission to leave the house, to take up employment, or to engage in fasting or forms of worship other than what is obligatory (that is, the fast of Ramadan). Such acts may infringe on the husband's right of "unhampered sexual access."

A man can enter up to four marriages at a time,[16] and can terminate each contract at will: he needs neither grounds for termination nor the consent or presence of his wife. Legally speaking, *talaq*, repudiation of the wife, is a unilateral act (*iqa'*), which acquires legal effect by the declaration of the husband. Likewise, a woman cannot be released without her husband's consent, although she can secure her release through offering him inducements, by means of *khul'*, often referred to as "divorce by mutual consent." As defined by classical jurists, *khul'* is a separation claimed by the wife as a result of her extreme "reluctance" (*karahiyya*) toward her husband, and the essential element is the payment of compensation (*'iwad*) to the husband in return for her release. This can be the return of the dower, or any other form of compensation. Unlike *talaq*, *khul'* is not a unilateral but a bilateral act, as it cannot take legal effect without the consent of the husband. If the wife fails to secure his consent, then her only recourse is the intervention of the court and the judge's power either to compel the husband to pronounce *talaq* or to pronounce it on his behalf.

Veiling or Seclusion?

Unlike rulings on marriage, classical *fiqh* texts contain little on the dress code for women. The prominence of veiling regulations in Islamic discourses is a recent phenomenon, dating to the nineteenth-century Muslim encounter with colonial powers. It was then that we see the emergence of a new genre of literature in which the veil acquires a civilizational dimension and becomes both a marker of Muslim identity and an element of faith.

Classical texts—at least those that set out rulings or what we can call ''positive law''—address the issue of dress for both men and women under ''covering'' (*sitr*), in the Book of Prayer, among the rules for covering the body during prayers, and in the Book of Marriage, among the rules that govern a man's ''gaze'' at a woman prior to marriage.[17]

The rules are minimal, but clear-cut: during prayer, both men and women must cover their *'awra,* their pudenda; for men, this is the area between the knees and the navel, but for women it means all of the body apart from hands, feet, and face. A man may not look at the uncovered body of an unrelated woman, but a woman may look at an unrelated man. The ban can be removed when a man wants to contract a marriage and needs to inspect the woman he is marrying. The rules concerning covering during prayer are discussed under *'ibadat* (ritual/worship acts), while rules of ''looking/gaze'' fall under *mu'amalat* (social/contractual acts).

There are also related rules in classical *fiqh* for segregation (banning any kind of interaction between unrelated men and women) and seclusion (restricting women's access to public space). They are based on two juristic constructs: the first is the one that defines all of a woman's body as *'awra,* pudenda, a zone of shame, which must be covered both during prayers (before God) and in public (before men); the second defines women's presence in public as a source of *fitna,* chaos, a threat to the social order.

These are, in a nutshell, the classical *fiqh* rulings on marriage and covering, which many today claim to be immutable and divinely ordained. The model of family and gender relations that they contain has come to be equated with the Shari'a notion of gender and is thereby invoked to legitimate patriarchy on religious grounds.

These rulings have been the subject of intense debate in the literature and among Muslims since the early twentieth century. But before outlining the contours of this debate and the positions taken, there are important questions to be asked: How far does this notion of gender reflect the principle of justice that is inherent in the Shari'a? Why and how does classical *fiqh* define marriage and covering in such a way that they deprive women of free will, confine them to the home and make them subject to male authority? These questions become even more crucial if we accept—as I do—the sincerity of the classical jurists' claim that they derive their ideal model of gender relations from the sacred sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Sunna.

JURISTIC FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY

There are two sets of related answers. The first set is ideological and political, and has to do with the strong patriarchal ethos that informed the classical jurists' readings of the sacred texts, and eventually led to the exclusion of women from the production of religious knowledge and their inability to

have their voices heard and their interests reflected in law. The second is more epistemological and concerns the ways in which social norms and gender ideologies were sanctified, and then turned into fixed entities in *fiqh*. That is, rather than considering practices relating to the "status of women" or "gender" as social issues, the classical jurists treated them as the subject matter of religious rulings (*mawadiʿ al-ahkam*). Let me elaborate.

The model of gender constructed by classical *fiqh* is grounded in the patriarchal ideology of pre-Islamic Arabia, which continued into the Islamic era, though in a modified form. There is an extensive debate on this in the literature, which I will not enter here.[18] Suffice it to say that the classical jurists' construction of the marriage contract was based on one type of marriage agreement prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia. Known as "marriage of dominion," this agreement closely resembled a sale through which a woman became the property of her husband. As John Esposito notes, it "produced a situation in which a woman was subjugated by males, her father, brother or close male relatives when she was virgin and her husband when she became a wife. As a matter of custom, she came to be regarded as little more than a piece of property."[19]

Many passages in the Qur'an condemn women's subjugation, affirm the principle of equality, and aim to reform existing practices in that direction.[20] Yet the classical jurists bypassed the spirit of these Qur'anic verses and reproduced women's subjugation—though in a mitigated form. What they did was to modify the pre-Islamic "marriage of dominion" so as to accommodate the Qur'anic call for reforms to enhance women's rights and protect them in marriage. Women became parties to, not subjects of, the contract and recipients of the dower or marriage gift. Likewise, by modifying the regulations on polygamy and divorce, the jurists curtailed men's scope of dominion over women in the contract, without altering the essence of the contract or freeing women from the authority of men—whether fathers or husbands. Fathers or guardians retained the right to contract the marriages of their daughters or female wards. While some schools gave a woman the option to annul a contract involving her after she reached puberty, in others the guardian was invested with the power of compulsion (*jabr*) that is, he could compel his daughter or ward into a marriage without her consent. This went against the very essence of Qur'anic reforms aimed at abolishing the pre-Islamic practice of coercing women into unwanted marriages.

The same applies to rulings on covering. Compulsory covering and seclusion for women have no basis in the Qur'an, and the *hadith* (Traditions) that some claim to support them have been also forcefully questioned.[21] As recent research has illustrated, the rulings on covering emerged from political and economic developments during the Abbasid period, and were shaped by the presence in public of slave girls and the commodification of their beauty and sexuality. It was then that rulings on covering during prayer, which come under *ʿibadat* (ritual acts), were extended to the realm of *muʿamalat*

(social acts), but only for free women, to distinguish them from slave women, who were forbidden to cover their hair in public.[22] It was in this context that compulsory covering came about, premised on the imperative of seclusion. The covering or confinement of free women was seen as the best means of protecting them in and from a public space that was deemed contaminated by the presence and sexuality of slave women. Previously, in particular during the era of the Prophet, there was little constraint on women's access to public space and their participation in the political and social affairs of the nascent Muslim community. Women took the oath of allegiance to the Prophet as men did; they fought in wars and prayed alongside men in mosques.

But the further we move from the time of revelation, the more women's voices are marginalized and excluded from political life. By the time the *fiqh* schools emerged, women were already excluded from the production of religious knowledge and their critical faculties were denigrated enough to make their concerns irrelevant to lawmaking processes.[23] Women were among transmitters of prophetic *hadith,* yet, as Sachedina reminds us:

> It is remarkable that even when women transmitters of hadith were admitted in the *ʿilm al-rijal* ("Science dealing with the scrutiny of the reports"), and...even when their narratives were recognized as valid documentation for deducing various rulings, they were not participants in the intellectual process that produced the prejudicial rulings encroaching upon the personal status of women. More importantly, the revelatory text, regardless of its being extracted from the Quran or the Sunna, was casuistically extrapolated in order to disprove a woman's intellectual and emotional capacities to formulate independent decisions that would have been sensitive and more accurate in estimating her radically different life experience.[24]

This takes us to the second set of mechanisms by which the egalitarian message of sacred texts was bypassed: the sanctification of patriarchy through *fiqh* rulings that ensured that women remained subordinate to men. In producing these rulings, classical jurists based their theological arguments on a number of philosophical, metaphysical, social and legal assumptions and theories, which in turn shaped their readings of the sacred texts. Salient philosophical/metaphysical assumptions that underline *fiqh* rulings on gender include the following: "women are created of and for men," "God made men superior to women," "women are defective in reason and faith." While these assumptions are not substantiated in the Qur'an—as recent scholarship has shown[25]—they became the main implicit theological assumptions determining how jurists discerned legal rules from the sacred texts.

The moral and social rationale for subjugation is found in the theory of difference in male and female sexuality, which goes as follows: God gave women greater sexual desire than men, but this is mitigated by two innate factors, men's *ghayra* (sexual honour and jealousy) and women's *haya*

(modesty and shyness). What jurists concluded from this theory was that women's sexuality, if left uncontrolled by men, runs havoc and is a threat to social order. Feminist scholarship on Islam gives vivid accounts of the working of this theory in medieval legal and erotic texts, and its impact on women's lives in contemporary Muslim societies.[26] Women's *haya* and men's *ghayra*, seen as innate qualities defining femininity and masculinity, in this way became tools for controlling women and the rationale for their exclusion from public life and their subjugation in marriage.[27] The sale contract, as already discussed, provided the juristic basis for women's subjugation in marriage, and the legal construction of women's bodies as *'awra* (pudenda) and of their sexuality as a source of *fitna* (chaos) removed them from public space, and thus from political life in Muslim societies.

I am not suggesting that there was a conspiracy among classical jurists to undermine women, or that they deliberately sought to ignore the voice of revelation. Rather I argue that, in discerning the terms of the Shari'a, and in reading the sacred texts, these jurists were guided by their outlook, the social and political realities of their age, and a set of legal, social, and gender assumptions and theories that reflected the state of knowledge and the normative values and patriarchal institutions of their time. These rulings—which were all the product of either juristic speculations or social norms and practices—came to be treated by successive generations as though they were immutable, as part of the Shari'a. This is what Sachedina calls the crisis of epistemology in the traditional evaluation of the Islamic legal heritage.

> The Muslim jurists, by exercise of their rational faculty to its utmost degree, recorded their reactions to the experiences of the community: *they created, rather than discovered, God's law*. What they created was a literary expression of their aspirations, their consensual interests, and their achievements; what they provided for Islamic society was an ideal, a symbol, a conscience, and a principle of order and identity.[28]

In this way, what were essentially time-bound phenomena were turned into juridical principles of permanent validity, and rulings on "women's status" and gender relations became fixed entities in *fiqh*. This was achieved, first by assimilating social norms into Shari'a ideals, second by classifying rulings pertaining to family and gender relations under the category of *mu'amalat* (social/private contracts, where the rulings are subject to rationalization and change) yet treating them as though they belonged to the category of *'ibadat* (acts of worship where the rulings are immutable and not open to rational discussion). In short, rathar than embodying the principles of justice and equity inherent in Shari'a ideals, the *fiqh* rulings on marriage and covering must be seen as literal expressions of the classical jurists' "ideals" of family and gender relations.

The patriarchal ideology of the time, as reflected in the *fiqh* texts, was so entrenched and so much part of the reality of classical jurists' lives that it left little room for debate and criticism from within. Most women of their time had little difficulty in accepting these rulings, as they reflected the way in which their roles were defined, and more importantly they had no choice but to submit. Women who did not accept such rulings could find some legal leeway, such as the insertion of stipulations in the marriage contract, to enable them to acquire a measure of autonomy in marriage.[29] Women with property and financial means were certainly in a better position—which points to another paradox in the construction of women's rights. While classical jurists recognized women's financial autonomy and right to control property, they denied women the right to control their own bodies or to participate in public life by their rulings on marriage and seclusion.

CONTEMPORARY GENDER DISCOURSES

With the rise of Western hegemony over the Muslim world and the spread of secular systems of education in the nineteenth century, the ideological hold of *fiqh* on social reality began to wane. At the same time, the colonial encounter turned the "status of women in Islam" into a contested issue, a symbolic political battleground between the forces of traditionalism and modernity, a situation that has continued ever since.

New gender discourses emerged and were aired in the vast literature on "women in Islam" that dates from the start of the twentieth century. Produced by religious publishing houses in both Muslim and Western countries, this literature is available (much of it now on the Internet) in a variety of languages, including English. It consists of highly varied texts, ranging from outright polemic to sound scholarship.[30] In terms of their gender perspective, these texts fall into two broad genres. The first, which comprises the majority of available texts and views, I term "Neo-Traditionalist." Its advocates uphold classical *fiqh* rulings and reject legal equality between the sexes as an imported "Western" concept that has no place in an Islamic worldview. Instead they argue for "complementarity of rights," sometimes called "gender equity" or "balance," which as we shall see, is a modified version of the classical *fiqh* gender discourse. The second genre, which I call "Reformist," argues for gender equality on all fronts. It emerged in the last two decades of the twentieth century, is still in the process of formation, and still constitutes only a small part of the literature.

Gender Balance: Inequality Redefined

The roots of the first new discourse can be traced to the nineteenth century and the Muslim world's encounter with Western colonial powers, but its

impact is linked with the emergence of modern nation-states in the twentieth century and the creation of modern legal systems inspired by Western models. It was during this period that, in many nation-states, classical *fiqh* rulings on family and gender issues were selectively reformed, codified, and gradually grafted onto a unified legal system.[31] The impetus for reform varied from one country to another. Each Muslim country has followed one of three paths: abandoning Islamic law in all spheres and replacing it with Western-inspired codes (Turkey is the only example); preserving and attempting to apply Islamic law in all spheres of law (the Gulf countries); or retaining and codifying Islamic law with respect to personal status law concerning family and inheritance, while abandoning it in other areas of law (the large majority of Muslim countries).

Those governments that codified family law introduced reforms through procedural rules, which in most cases left the substance of the classical *fiqh* rulings unchanged. Tunisia was the exception, incorporating the principle of gender equity into its 1956 family law.[32]

In the process of adaptation, family law moved from being the concern of private scholars operating within a particular *fiqh* school to the legislative assembly of a particular nation-state. Statute books took the place of *fiqh* manuals and texts in regulating the legal status of women in society. This not only led to the creation of a hybrid family law that is neither *fiqh* nor Western but also a new gender discourse that is neither entirely traditionalist nor modern. Though commonly termed Islamic Modernism, I suggest that "Neo-Traditionalism" is a more apt term for this discourse, as it shares the classical jurists' basic understanding of gender. Where it differs is that, unlike classical jurists, advocates of the new discourse are able to impose their notions through the machinery of a modern nation-state. This has given patriarchal interpretations of the Shari'a a new force and unprecedented powers.[33]

The Neo-Traditionalist gender discourse is found not only in the legal codes of Muslim countries but also in a new type of texts that, unlike classical *fiqh* texts, neither are necessarily produced by jurists nor are strictly legal in their reasoning and arguments, which makes them more accessible to the general public. Largely written by men—at least until recently—the overt aims of these texts are to shed new light on the status of women in Islam and to clarify what they see as "misunderstandings about the law of Islam." The main themes through which the authors of these texts address the issue of gender relations and define a range of positions are women's covering, marriage and divorce laws, and women's right to education and employment. Despite their variety and diverse cultural origins, what these authors have in common is an oppositional stance and a defensive or apologetic tone: oppositional, because their concern is to resist change and suppress voices of dissent from inside, which they see as "invasion of Western and alien values"; apologetic, because by going back to classical *fiqh* and upholding its rulings they

inadvertently expose—and have to defend—its inherent and anachronistic gender biases.

Unwilling to accept that the aspiration for gender equality is not just an imported (Western) concept but part of modern realities, these authors often find themselves in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, they adopt an uncritical approach to classical *fiqh* constructions of marriage and gender relations, and on the other hand, they are aware of, and sensitive to, criticisms of patriarchal bias; they begin their texts with abstract and general statements such as ''Islam affirms the basic equality of men and women,'' ''Islam grants women all their rights,'' and ''Islam protects and honours women.'' It is common to find a single text in which the author accepts the principle of gender equality on one issue (usually on women's education and employment, where classical *fiqh* is more or less silent), but rejects it on matters related to covering and family law (where classical *fiqh* is strident).

Neo-Traditionalist texts lack the legal coherence and the sense of real conviction that imbue classical *fiqh* texts. Keen to distance themselves from overtly patriarchal language and concepts, their authors keep silent on the juristic theories and theological and other assumptions that underlie these rulings in classical *fiqh* texts. For instance, they ignore the parallels in the legal structures of the contracts of marriage and sale, and views such as those of Ghazali (quoted earlier), which see marriage as a type of enslavement for women. Such views are so repugnant to modern sensibilities and values, so alien from the experience of marriage among contemporary Muslims, that no defender of *fiqh* rulings can acknowledge them. Yet the patriarchal logic and the notion of sale, implicit in their texts, come to the surface when they resort to legal arguments, as in the following explanation of why women cannot have equal rights to divorce:

> If she were to be given this right, she would grow over-bold and easily violate the men's rights. It is evident that if a person buys something with money, he tries to keep it as long as he can. He parts with it only when he cannot help it. But when a thing is purchased by one individual, and the right to cast it away is given to another, there is little hope that the latter will protect the interest of the buyer, who invested the money. Investing man with the right to divorce amounts to the protection of his legitimate rights. This is also checks the growth of the divorce rate.[34]

A large majority of the Neo-Traditionalist texts place the focus on the ethical and moral rules that marriage entails for each spouse, drawing attention to those Qur'anic verses and *hadith* that affirm the essential equality of the sexes. Yet, they fail to mention that these ethical rules, in effect, carry no legal sanction, nor do they offer any suggestions as to how they can be translated into legal imperatives. Likewise, while rejecting *fiqh* rulings on seclusion, Neo-Traditionalist texts defend the principle of gender segregation and

speak of *hijab* (covering) as a religious duty that mandates a woman to cover her hair and body (with the exception of face and hands) when in the presence of unrelated men and in public. A good example is Jamal Badawi's booklet, *Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles.* Marriage, Badawi states, "is about peace, love and compassion, not just the satisfaction of men's needs," but then he goes on to reproduce all the *fiqh* rulings on marriage and divorce almost verbatim.[35] In line with other texts in this genre, Badawi is content with simply outlining what he calls "normative teachings of Islam," glosses over male dominance, and imputes the injustices that women suffer in marriage and society to what he calls "diverse cultural practices among Muslims." He seems to be unaware that many of the *fiqh* rulings that he reproduces negate the "basic principles" of "gender equity" that he claims as Islamic in his booklet.

Two texts of this genre that offer a new rationalization and defense of the classical *fiqh* rulings on marriage and covering and contain a theory of gender rights, are Murteza Mutahhari's *System of Women's Rights in Islam* and Maulana Abul A'la Maududi's *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam.*[36] Both authors were Islamic ideologues, and their writings, rooted in anticolonial and anti-Western discourses, have become seminal texts for Islamist groups and movements. Writing in Urdu in the 1930s, in the context of pre-partition India, Maududi's adamant rejection and condemnation of modernity and liberal values have made him more appealing to radical Islamists. For him, the problem with Muslims is that they have abandoned their own way of life and adopted secular (that is, Western and to some extent Hindu) values that have corrupted them and are destroying their civilization. The solution he offers is an "Islamic state" with the power and inclination to enforce the Islamic way of life, where women's seclusion and control by men are foundational. Mutahhari, writing in Persian in 1960s Iran as part of the religious opposition to the Shah's secularizing policies, is less adamant in his opposition to modernity and less overtly patriarchal: he is more popular with moderate Islamist groups.

These two texts differ in style, language, and sophistication, but they follow the same line of argument, based on the same premises of the "naturalness" of laws in Islam and the "innate difference" between men and women. These two premises become the pillars of a new defense of gender inequality, which goes as follows: though men and women are created equal and are equal in the eyes of God, the roles assigned to them in creation are different, and *fiqh* rules reflect this difference. Differences in rights and duties do not mean inequality or injustice; if correctly understood, they are the very essence of justice. This is so, they argue, because these rulings not only reflect the Shari'a, the divine blueprint for society, but they are also in line with "human nature" (*fitra*) and take into consideration the biological and psychological differences between the sexes.

This new defense has, ironically, further accentuated the internal contradictions and anachronisms in classical *fiqh* rulings. For example, if, as the classical theory of sexuality holds, women's sexual desire is greater than men's, and if laws in Islam work with, not against, the grain of nature, then how can they allow men but not women to contract more than one marriage at a time? Surely God would not give women greater sexual desire, and then allow men to be the polygamists and make covering obligatory for women? The Neo-Traditionalists resolve such contradictions by modifying the classical theory of sexuality, to eliminate its conflict with the newly advocated theory of the naturalness of *fiqh*-based law. Women's sexuality, thus, is now explained as passive and responsive, and men's as active and aggressive—a theory that has indeed little precedent in classical texts.[37]

It is important to note here that, in arguing for such a theory of sexuality, both Maududi and Mutahhari do not quote Islamic texts but Western psychological and sociological studies. Their readings of these—now long outdated—sources are quite selective, and they cite as ''scientific evidence'' only those that are in line with *fiqh* definitions of marriage. They are also selective in their readings of the sacred texts and in their usage of classical *fiqh* concepts and definitions.

To give a flavor of these arguments, let me quote from Mutahhari's defense of men's unilateral right to terminate the marriage contract. His arguments, in my view, are the most refined among those that give the concept of gender equality no place in Islam. As already mentioned, he argues that ''human nature'' (*fitra*) is reflected in the naturalness of Shari'a laws. Though his language and his theory of sexuality differ from those of the classical *fiqh* texts, the male-centred view of creation and the notion of marriage as dominance remain the same.

> Nature has devised the ties of husband and wife in such a form that the part of woman is to respond to the love of man. The affection and love of a woman that is genuine and stable can only be that love which is born as a reaction to the affection and admiration of man toward her. So the attachment of the woman to the man is the result of the attachment of the man to the woman and depends upon it. Nature has given the key of love of both sides to the man, the husband. If he loves his wife and is faithful to her, the wife also loves him and remains faithful to him. It is admitted that woman is naturally more faithful than man, and that a woman's unfaithfulness is a reaction to the unfaithfulness of the man.[38]

Having defined women's sexuality as passive and subordinated to that of men, Mutahhari now gives a new rationalization for why *fiqh* gives men the right of divorce.

> Nature has deposited the key of the natural dissolution of marriage in the custody of man. In other words, it is man who by his own apathy and unfaithfulness

> toward his wife makes her cold and unfaithful. Conversely, if the indifference begins on the side of the wife, it does not affect the affection of the man, rather, incidentally, it makes the affection more acute.[39]

The logical conclusion to be drawn is that there is no need for any change or reform in the laws of marriage and divorce.

> Sometimes these people ask: ‘‘Why does divorce take the form of a release, an emancipation? Surely it should have a judicial form.’’ To answer these people it should be said: ‘‘Divorce is a release in the same way that marriage is a state of dominance. If you can possibly do so, change the natural law of seeking a mate in its absoluteness with regard to the male and the female, remove the natural state of marriage from the condition of dominance; if you can, make the role of the male and female sexes in all human beings and animals identical in their relations, and change the law of nature. Then you will be able to rid divorce of its aspect of release and emancipation.’’[40]

Gender Equality: Questioning the Premises of Inequality

With the rise of political Islam in the second part of the twentieth century, and the rallying cry of ‘‘Return to the Shari‘a’’ as embodied in *fiqh* rulings, Islamist political movements appropriated these Neo-Traditionalist texts and their gender discourse. Family law reforms introduced earlier in the century by modernist governments in some Muslim countries were dismantled, for instance in Iran, Algeria, and Egypt. In Iran, after the establishment in 1979 of an Islamic state ruled by clerics, women’s covering and gender segregation in public space became mandatory. Women from all walks of life came to experience the harsh reality of subjugation to a religious patriarchy fused with the machinery of a modern state.

Paradoxically, the Islamists’ slogan of ‘‘Return to Shari‘a’’ and their attempt to translate *fiqh* notions of gender into policy became the catalyst for a critique of these notions and a spur to women’s increased activism. In Iran and elsewhere, a new phase began in the politics of gender in Islam as growing numbers of women came to question whether there was an inherent or logical link between Islamic ideals and patriarchy. One crucial element of this new phase has been that it places women themselves—rather than the abstract notion of ‘‘the status of woman in Islam’’—at the heart of the battle between forces of traditionalism and modernism. Using the language of political Islam and advocating a brand of feminism that takes Islam as the source of its legitimacy, women started to challenge the hegemony of patriarchal interpretations of the Shari‘a and to question the validity of the views of those who until now have spoken in the name of Islam. Such a challenge was made possible, even inevitable, by the Islamists’ ideological construction of Islam, and the very methods and sources that the Neo-Traditionalists used

in their defense and rationalization of *fiqh* constructions of gender rights. By relying on arguments and sources outside religion and by imposing their patriarchal vision of the Shari'a through the machinery of a modern state, the Islamists inadvertently opened the door to a sustained critique of religious patriarchy in ways that were not previously possible.[41]

By the late 1980s, a new way of thinking about gender emerged, a discourse that is "feminist" in its aspiration and demands, yet "Islamic" in its language and sources of legitimacy. Some versions of this new discourse came to be labelled "Islamic Feminism"—a notion that remains contested by both the majority of Islamists and some secular feminists, who see it as antithetical to their respective positions and ideologies, and as a contradiction in terms.[42]

"Islamic Feminism" is part of a new "Reformist" (as I call it) religious thinking that is consolidating a conception of Islam and modernity as compatible, not opposed. Reformist thinkers do not reject an idea simply because it is Western, nor do they see Islam as providing a blueprint, as having an inbuilt program of action for the social, economic, and political problems of the Muslim world. Following and building on the work of earlier reformers such as Mohammad Abduh, Muhammad Iqbal, and Fazlur Rahman, they contend that the human understanding of Islam is flexible, that Islam's tenets can be interpreted to encourage both pluralism and democracy, and that Islam allows change in the face of time, space, and experience.[43] Not only do they pose a serious challenge to legalistic and absolutist conceptions of Islam, but they are also carving a space within which Muslim women can achieve gender equality in law.

Instead of searching for an Islamic genealogy for modern concepts like gender equality, human rights, and democracy (the concern of earlier reformers) the new thinkers place the emphasis on how religion is understood and how religious knowledge is produced. In this respect, the works of the new wave of Muslim thinkers—such as Mohammad Arkoun, Nasr Abu Zayd, and Abdolkarim Soroush—are of immense importance and relevance. In particular, Soroush's interpretative-epistemological theory of the evolution of religious knowledge—known as "The Contraction and Expansion of Shari'a"—makes possible a reconciliation of faith with rationality and with contemporary notions of justice and women's rights.[44]

In Soroush's words:

> Our understanding of revealed texts is contingent upon the knowledge already set around us; that is to say that forces external to Revelation drag our interpretation and understanding of it in various directions.... Believers generally conceive of religion as something holy or sacred, something constant. You cannot talk about change or evolution of religious knowledge. They stick to the idea of fixity. But as I have demonstrated in my work, we have to make a distinction between religion on the one side and religious interpretation on the other. By religion here I mean not faith which is the subjective part of religion but the

> objective side which is the revealed text. This is constant, whereas our interpretations of that text are subject to evolution. The idea is not that religious texts can be changed but rather over time interpretations will change. We are always immersed in an ocean of interpretations. The text does not speak to you. You have to make it speak by asking questions of it.[45]

Such an approach to religious texts is opening the way for the radical rethinking of some *fiqh* rulings to accommodate concepts such as gender equality and human rights. Though in Iran their views have not yet been adequately reflected in legislation, reformist clerics have been challenging old *fiqh* wisdoms and trying to promote gender equality within an Islamic framework. For instance, since the early 1990s, Mohsen Sa'idzadeh has been trying to formulate and defend the "gender equality" perspective in *fiqh*, which he claims to have been supported by a number of eminent jurists in the past.[46] In 2003, another reformist cleric, Mohsen Kadivar, argued that over 90 percent of what were considered to be Islamic laws relating to women needed to be revised and rethought in line with contemporary notions of justice and gender, as they no longer qualified for the epithets "Islamic" or "*shar'i*." According to him, for a ruling or a law to be considered part of the Shari'a it must meet three criteria. The first is the soundness of its rational basis: it must satisfy the rational demands of the time. Second, it must be in line with justice of its time. Third, it must be more advanced and progressive than existing laws in other societies. The laws introduced by the Prophet met all of these criteria. People accepted them, not because the Prophet had introduced them, but because they corresponded with their sense of justice and ideas of rationality as well as being more advanced and progressive than existing laws.[47]

The new "Reformist" thinking is still evolving and it is too early to outline the contours of its gender discourse. But it clearly differs from that of the Neo-Traditionalists in three major ways. First, Reformist discourse does not see the *fiqh* notion of gender as sacrosanct or its rulings as above critical evaluation. Second, in contrast to Neo-Traditionalist authors such as Maududi and Mutahhari, who introduce questionable Western sources and "scientific" and naturalist theories to explain and justify the disparity between men and women's rights in the Shari'a, Reformist thinkers return to Islamic sources to argue for the necessity of a new reading of these sources in line with changed conditions and the principles of justice and equality that are now agreed to be an essential part of Islam's message. Finally, and most importantly in my view, the Reformists are more or less silent on women's sexuality, a silence which is important as it not only enables them to promote an Islamic jurisprudence where women can be treated as social rather than merely sexual beings but also in time can sever the link (implicit in classical *fiqh* rulings) between constructions of gender and theories of sexuality. It is this link that underlies the inability of Neo-Traditionalist writers to go

beyond old *fiqh* notions of gender rights, despite their success in making equality between sexes in the spiritual realm an undisputed element of contemporary gender discourses.[48]

SOME ANSWERS?

Let me end this chapter by suggesting some answers to my opening questions, which I would now rephrase as: How and why were classical constructions of gender in Islamic law premised on such a strong theory of inequality that they came to by-pass the values and objectives of the Shari'a? Can there be an equal construction of gender rights in Islamic law?

I explored the first question in the context of the classical *fiqh* discourse on gender. The gist of my argument was that the genesis of gender inequality in Islamic law lies in the inner contradictions between the ideals of the Shari'a and the norms of Muslim societies. While Shari'a ideals call for freedom, justice, and equality, their realization was impeded in the formative years of Islamic law by Muslim social norms and structures. Instead, these social norms were assimilated into *fiqh* rulings through a set of theological, legal, and social theories and assumptions that reflected the state of knowledge of the time, or were part of the cultural fabric of society.[49] In this way, Islamic legal tradition became the prisoner of its own theories and assumptions, which in time came to overshadow the "ethical" voice of Islam and its call for justice and reform, thus negating the spirit of the Shari'a.

I raised the second question—the possibility of achieving gender equality within an Islamic framework—through a discussion of two new legal discourses that emerged in the twentieth century. The Neo-Traditionalists succeeded in rounding some of the harsher edges of classical *fiqh* notions of gender, but their defensive and apologetic approach left them in an intellectual cul-de-sac. The Reformists, who emerged in the closing years of the century as part of an internal response to political Islam, display a refreshing pragmatic vigor and a willingness to engage with nonreligious perspectives. They have also sheltered feminist voices and feminist scholarship, which are shifting the old and tired debate on "women's rights in Islam" onto new ground.[50]

These feminist voices in Islam, in my view, are in a unique position to bring about a much needed paradigm shift in Islamic law. They are exposing the inequalities embedded in current interpretations of the Shari'a, not as manifestations of the divine will but as constructions by male jurists. This exposure has important epistemological and political consequences. Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument demonstrates that some rules hitherto claimed as "Islamic" and part of the Shari'a are in fact merely reflections of the views and perceptions of some Muslims, and are rooted in social practices and norms that are neither sacred nor immutable but human and changing.

The political consequence is both to free Muslims from taking defensive positions and to enable them to go beyond old *fiqh* dogmas in search of new questions and new answers.

Both these feminist voices and the reformist Islam of which they are a part are still in a formative phase, and their future prospects are tied to political developments all over the Muslim world—and to global politics. Their hope of redressing the gender inequalities in orthodox interpretations of the Shari'a depends on the balance of power between Neo-Traditionalists and Reformists, and their ability to organize and participate in the political process and to engage with the advocates of each discourse. They have already started to make their impact, as evidenced in the trend of family law reforms in the new millennium, notably the 2004 Moroccan family code that establishes equality in marriage and divorce between spouses within an Islamic framework.[51]

NOTES

1. This chapter draws on and expands the argument of Mir-Hosseini (2003a and 2006). An earlier version was presented in the Ertegun Open Seminar Series at Princeton University in November 2005. I am grateful to Elizabeth Frierson for inviting me to Princeton, and to other participants in the seminar, in particular Christine Stansell for her comments as discussant, and Michael Cook for criticism that helped me to clarify my argument. My warmest gratitude goes to Richard Tapper who read the chapter in its various incarnations and helped in the process of writing.
2. A clear statement of position is important, as the literature on Islam and women is replete with polemic in the guise of scholarship, see Mir-Hosseini (1999: 3–6).
3. Among current scholars of Islamic law, Kamali (1989: 216) and Abou El Fadl (2001: 32–35) use this distinction; An-Na'im (2000: 33–34) does not.
4. For a discussion of conceptions of justice in Islamic texts, see Khadduri (1984). In brief, there are two schools of theological thought. The prevailing *Ash'ari* school holds that our notion of justice is contingent on religious texts: whatever they say is just and not open to question. The *Mu'tazili* school, on the other hand, argues that the value of justice exists independent of religious texts; our sense and definition of justice is shaped by sources outside religion, is innate and has a rational basis. I adhere to the second position as developed by Abdolkarim Soroush, the Iranian reformist philosopher. According to Soroush, we accept religion because it is just, and any religious texts or laws that defy our contemporary sense of justice or its definition should be reinterpreted in the light of an ethical critique of their religious roots. In other words religion and the interpretation of religious texts are not above justice and ethics. In summer 2004, Soroush expounded his argument in a series of four lectures on "Religious Society, Ethical Society," delivered in Amir-Kabir University, Tehran (not yet available in print but available as audio cassettes, Tehran: Sarat).
5. Kamali (1996: 21).
6. Ahmed (1991: 58).

7. It is important to note that, as feminist scholarship on religion teaches us, such a tension is present in other scriptural religions. See Gross (1993) for this tension in Buddhism, Ruether (1983) and Schussler Fiorenza (1984) for Christianity, Herschel (1983) and Plaskow (2005) for Judaism.

8. For differences among the *fiqh* schools, see Ali (2002), Maghniyyah (1997).

9. Ghazali (1998: 89). For another rendering of this passage, see Farah (1984:120).

10. Hilli (1985: 428).

11. Ruxton (1916: 106). Jorjani, another Maliki jurist, defines marriage in the following terms: "a contract through which the husband acquires exclusive rights over the sexual organs of woman" (quoted by Pesle 1936: 20).

12. For similarities in the juristic conceptions of slavery and marriage, see Marmon (1999) and Willis (1985).

13. For these disagreements see Ali (2003: 70–82); for the impact of these disagreements on rulings related to *mahr* and the ways in which classical jurists discussed them, see Ibn Rushd (1996: 31–33).

14. For differentiation by Hanafi jurists between social and commercial exchange, and the valorization of the human body, see Johansen (1995, 1996).

15. For a discussion, see 'Abd Al 'Ati (1997); the last purpose takes the prime place in the writings of radical Islamists such as Maududi (1983, 1998).

16. In Shi'a law a man may contract as many temporary marriages (*mut'a*) as he desires or can afford. For this form of marriage, see Haeri (1989).

17. Many terms commonly used today in different countries for 'the veil', such as *hijab, parda* ('purdah'), *chador, burqa,* are not found in classical *fiqh* texts. For a discussion of *hijab* in *fiqh* texts, see Mutahhari (1992).

18. Some ('Abd Al 'Ati 1997, Esposito 1982) argue that the advent of Islam weakened the patriarchal structures of Arabian society, others (Ahmed 1992, Mernissi 1991) that it reinforced them. The latter also maintain that, before the advent of Islam, society was undergoing a transition from matrilineal to patrilineal descent, that Islam facilitated this by giving patriarchy the seal of approval, and that the Qur'anic injunctions on marriage, divorce, inheritance, and whatever relates to women both reflect and affirm such a transition. Both base their conclusions on the work of William Robertson Smith. For concise accounts of the debate, see Smith (1985), Spellberg (1991).

19. Esposito (1982: 14–15).

20. Of more than 6,000 verses in the Qur'an, only six treat men and women differently; four of these concern marriage and divorce (Qur'an 2: 222, 228 and 4: 3, 34). For a discussion, see Sardar Ali (1998). For egalitarian interpretations of these verses, see Barlas (2002), Guardi (2004), Mubarak (2004), Umar (2004), Wadud (1999, 2004).

21. See Mernissi (1991), El Guindi (1999: 152–7), Abou El Fadl (2001: 209–263), Stowasser (1997).

22. There are two important recent studies of this. Hajjaji-Jarrah (2003) shows the influence of social forces on the way in which the *hijab* verses were understood in the works of two commentators (Tabari and Razi). Clark (2003) shows the lack of concern with women's covering in the Hadith literature, and no explicit reference

to the covering of hair; there are more *hadith* on men's dress and covering their *'awra* than on women's dress.

23. As Abou-Bakr (2004) shows, women remained active in transmitting religious knowledge, but their activities were limited to the informal arena of homes and mosques and their status as jurists was not officially recognized.

24. Sachedina (1999b: 149).

25. See Barlas (2002), Hassan (1987, 1996), Mernissi (1991), Wadud (1999, 2004).

26. See Mernissi (1985), Mir-Hosseini (2004), Sabbah (1984).

27. This rationale is found in many contemporary texts on women in Islam; an explicit example is Maududi (1998).

28. Sachedina (1999a: 29); emphasis added.

29. Here I am concerned with the theory of Islamic law, not with its practice. It is essential to note that, while at the theoretical level the *fuqaha* claim that Islamic law is immutable, at the level of practice, flexibility and adaptability are two of its salient features, which have enabled it to be meaningful in a variety of cultural and social contexts from the outset. For an insightful discussion of the ways in which women in premodern times related to Islamic law, see Rapoport (2005) and Sonbol (1996, esp. Introduction); for contemporary examples, see Mir-Hosseini (1993), Welchman (1999).

30. For a discussion of such writings in the Arab world, see Haddad (1998), Stowasser (1993); for Iran, see Mir-Hosseini (1999); for Muslims living in Europe and North America, see Roald (2001); texts in English include Abusulayman (2003), Badawi (1995), Chaudhry (1995), Doi (1989), Khan (1995), Maududi (1983, 1998), Mutahhari (1991, 1992), Rahman (1986), Siddiqi (1952), Al-Sadlaan (1999).

31. For a concise discussion of the terms of the marriage contract and their adoption by legal codes in Arab countries, see El Alami (1996).

32. See Nasir (1990:125–142). For reforms and codification of family law in the Muslim world, see Anderson (1976), Mahmood (1972), El Alami and Hinchcliffe (1996).

33. See Mir-Hosseini (1993: 10–13).

34. Maududi (1983).

35. Badawi (1995); a short version of the booklet is posted on several Islamist websites.

36. Mutahhari (1991), Maududi (1998); both books are available in English and Arabic and have gone through many editions; for a reading of their texts, see Shehadeh (2003).

37. 'Allama Tabataba'i, the renowned Shi'i philosopher, was the first to advance this theory in his monumental Qur'anic commentary known as *Al-Mizan,* written in Arabic between 1954 and 1972; see Mir-Hosseini (2003b).

38. Ibid., 274.

39. Ibid., 297.

40. Ibid., 298.

41. I elaborate this in Mir-Hosseini (2006).

42. There is now a growing literature on Islamic feminism; see, for instance, Afshar (1998), Badran (2002), Fernea (1998), Mir-Hosseini (1999, 2006), Mirza (2000, 2006), Paidar (1996), Roald (1998), Shaikh (2003), Yamani (1996).

43. For the textual genealogy of this thinking, see Kurzman (1998).

44. Although Soroush himself, in line with many other religious intellectuals in Iran, does not subscribe to the gender equality perspective, his ideas have not only laid the foundation of what later became known in Iran (following President Muhammad Khatami's election in 1997) as the Reform Movement, but enabled religious women like those of *Zanan* magazine to reconcile their faith with their feminism. For Soroush's ideas on gender and my debate with him, see Mir-Hosseini (1999: Chapter 7); for selections of his writings in English, see Soroush (2000).

45. Soroush (1996).

46. For his work, see Mir-Hosseini (1999: Chapter 8).

47. Kadivar (2003).

48. Mir-Hosseini (2004).

49. See also Masud (2001).

50. Many of these scholars still avoid the term 'feminist' and instead call themselves Muslim women scholars or activists (see Webb 2000). A large majority of them have focused their scholarship on Qur'anic interpretation: Barlas (2002), Hassan (1987, 1996, 1999), Jawad (1998), Mernissi (1991), Shaikh (1997), Wadud (1999, 2004). The following deal directly with *fiqh:* Al-Hibri (1997, 2000, 2001), Ali (2002, 2003), Mir-Hosseini (1999, 2003a), Sardar Ali (1998). Abou El Fadl (2001), An-Na'im (2000), Engineer (1992) and Esack (2001) are prominent among male scholars who have written on women's rights.

51. For the new code see Foblets and Carlier (2005), and for related debates and political context, see Buskens (2003).

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6

Transitions in the "Progress" of Civilization: Theorizing History, Practice, and Tradition

Ebrahim Moosa

> Life changes fast.
> Life changes in an instant.
> You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.
> The question of self-pity...
> You had to feel the swell change. You had to go with the change. He told me that. No eye is on the sparrow but he did tell me that.
>
> —Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

> Clever people are not credited with their follies: what a deprivation of human rights!
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

INTRODUCTION

Those who think that "progressive" Islam is a ready-made ideology or an off-the-shelf creed, movement, or pack of doctrines will be sorely disappointed. It is not even a carefully calibrated theory or interpretation of Muslim law, theology, ethics, and politics. Neither is it a school of thought. Instead, I would argue that progressive Islam is a wish-list, a desire, and, if at all something, then it is literally, accumulated action, as the word "progress" in the phrase "a work-in progress" suggests. At best it is a practice.

Another way of putting it is to say that progressive Islam is a posture: an attitude. What kind of attitude? Here lies the rub. To say *what* that attitude is, to give it content or even to be as bold as to say what it is *not,* is to sound like the high priestess or gatekeeper for "progressive Islam." It is best not to invite such recriminations.

Yet, persons who are tightly or lightly associated with what is broadly identified as ''progressive Islam'' will propose different practices and accompanying methodologies to verify and justify the content of the ethical propositions, philosophical visions, and contestations of history they hold. All this disagreement and difference is perfectly healthy for creative thinking in Muslim thought, especially ethical thought. What would certainly signal the death-knell for progressive Muslim thought is if there were to emerge a single voice, a unifying institution, a exclusive guild or association of scholars and practitioners who monopolized the epithet ''progressive'' and dictated its operations, debated its values and determined its content, like an orthodoxy. If so, then the ship of progressive Islam leaves port badly listing.

What goes by the broad rubric of progressive Islam takes many forms. In some places it is the life and death struggles of people who are trying to make sense of the intensities of life whether in repressive patriarchal contexts, in the grips of rampant poverty, famine, and war, or in the midst of disease of pandemic proportions. In more favorable conditions, there too similar challenges await, albeit disguised by affluence and enviable certainty. Relying on their multiple traditions and the resources of transnational civilizations, many Muslims are trying to find meaning for their lives. In ways not yet clearly articulated these individuals and communities are the lifeblood of what I would call progressive Islam. Detailed ethnographies of such communities and the substance of their struggles are documented elsewhere in this volume. In this reflection, I prefer to outline some key concepts and ideas that emerged during my journey and discovery of how to critically engage the Muslim knowledge traditions. As it will forever remain a work-in-progress, I have more questions than answers; some of my observations will come by way of points of clarification and caveats. What might appear to be answers and exhortations, despite their vehemence, I would urge my reader to regard as tentative.

How does one develop a critical approach to tradition? If past experiences became the social laboratory for the making of tradition, why cannot our current experiences as Muslims become the threads to manufacture the garment of tradition? While there is no sensible and intelligent way to know how a revitalized tradition would unfold, the search for emergent knowledge and ethics has to continue energetically. Intellectuals and activists all have a responsibility to recast the knowledge of tradition and thus tradition in light of their contemporary experiences.

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

A great deal is both revealed and repressed in a name. The term ''progressive'' used to designate a loosely knit group of activists and thinkers advocating a different narrative of Islam compared to the dominant one is to

be sure an oppositional term. In fact, for this author, the term "progressive" is itself a source of discomfort for reasons to be explained later, but I continue to employ it with caveats for the lack of a better substitute. As some French philosophers have helpfully suggested, one can use the term under "erasure."

Progressives differ in significant ways from the dominant orthodoxies of Islamic revivalism and traditionalism in their respective methodologies and ideologies. At least, I view myself in a complex relation to the intellectual heritage and multiple cultural formations in which Muslims lived and prospered, flourished and failed, as well as changed and stabilized. One of the major points of departure for progressives is the heightened and surplus freight of ideology evident in the interpretations propounded by representatives of Islamic revivalism, such as the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt or the Jamat-e Islami of India and Pakistan to the orthodox seminaries of Al-Azhar in Egypt, the Deobandi, Barelwi, and Ahle Hadith schools of India and Pakistan, the schools of Najaf in Iraq, Qum in Iran, and the varieties of puritan (*salafi*) tendencies in the Gulf region and elsewhere, to mention but a prominent few. Each of these groups also have a global presence, as well as representation in Europe and North America where Muslim minorities are on the rise.

To be sure, just as progressives cannot artificially be made to look alike (homogenized), so too it would be wrong to portray contending views to be uniform. However, for the purpose of characterization, but not defamation, I am compelled to resort to a certain strategic essentialism to describe how my views by way of general brushstrokes differ from those of my opponents. A more careful and technically nuanced comparison belongs to another genre of writing and cannot be composed in the brevity of the space and scope allotted here. The assertion that at least some individuals affiliated with the above-mentioned tendencies, vague as it might sound, would endorse certain aspects of progressive methodology and practice while refraining from doing so with respect to other aspects remains true. This observation should put paid to any illusion that progressive viewpoints are solely the preserve of scholars in the North American academy.

Hence, when I allege that some viewpoints held by Muslim groups are ideological, it is animated by some very specific concerns. Perpetuating an inhibiting cultural inheritance suggests a denial of the obvious facts of the world and the absence of common sense. In a nutshell I would say that the major differences between Muslim progressives and their critics would be that the latter are either wedded to dated methodologies or committed to doctrines and interpretations that have lost their rationales and relevance over time. On the other hand, progressives are also painfully aware that to uncritically succumb to every fact and fad also makes little sense, since it results in a Panglossian option of being unwaveringly and unrealistically optimistic about everything in the modern style.

Many find the term ''progressive'' to be exclusionary. In other words, does it imply that if one does not subscribe to a progressive agenda that one is by default adhering to a retrograde agenda? In my view such an inference is a flawed one. Any definition can be deployed in both an affirmative and a negative manner. To say that one is black, is a statement that primarily affirms one's black identity and does not necessarily imply the negation of white identity. However, what such a claim does propose is to signal a difference in identities. Similarly, to say that one is American or Indian does not mean that one necessarily despises Canadians or Pakistanis. What such a label affirms is a package of loyalties and commitments, which in some rare instances, especially during conflict, might turn out to be badge of hostility and exclusion.

Another shorthand way to describe my intellectual approach would be to designate it as critical traditionalism, for reasons that will hopefully become clear later. But someone could make the point that in the very act of naming, one is implying that others are just the opposite: uncritical traditionalists. In reality one is trying to assert the element that distinguishes one's intellectual agenda from those of others. What is distinctive in my work is to engage with tradition critically: to constantly interrogate tradition and strive to ask productive questions.

AMBIVALENCE OF PROGRESS

If some are drawn to the term ''progress'' then others are recoiled by its echo. Those who buy into a Hegelian worldview imagine that history is moving toward some clearly defined and concrete end. For believers of this stripe, any change is productive and clearly directed toward a wholesome ''progress.'' Epitomizing this viewpoint is Francis Fukuyama in his controversial book, *The End of History and the Last Man*.[1] For Fukuyama, philosophers of old have held that history has an end, not as events, occurrences, and happenings, but as something more deeply philosophical and profound. In this view ''history'' means a single, coherent, evolutionary process that takes into account the experiences of all peoples over all times. As an evolutionary process, if not a program, Fukuyama believes that history is neither random nor unintelligible. Societies develop with coherence from tribal ones based on slavery and subsistence agricultures to theocracies, aristocracies to culminate in liberal democracies driven by technology-rich capitalism. All this is the result of ''progress'' in history.

In Fukuyama's view we have reached such a pinnacle of progress that the principles and institutions underlying liberal democratic societies will no longer be in need of alteration or have to be changed. The evolution of history has determined for us what we should behold as the ideal institutions: not communism but capitalism; not socialism but liberal democracy;

and definitely, no imponderable third way. In his determination to prove the salvific benefits of liberal democratic progress, Fukuyama drifts into the morally unsettling and theologically Christian territory of eschatology that produces utopia and messianism.

However, there is something deeply troubling and unquestioned in such a conception of progress. Progress becomes hubristic when it only emphasizes the mastery of nature but does not recognize the retrogression of society. Such a vision of progress, notes the German thinker Walter Benjamin, displays the technocratic features that was a hallmark of fascism and other kinds of authoritarian societies. Lots of unsavory movements have in the name of progress been treated as historical norms when in fact they were aberrations. Yoked to the tyranny of unchanging principles is a notion of secular progress that is as fundamentalist in its posture as its religiously inspired counterparts.

This view of progress was inspired by certain biblical themes of an apocalyptic end and driven by a mechanistic view to create a New Jerusalem. In numerous apocalyptic writings, Ernest Lee Tuveson comments, history was endowed with a plot and encompassed a narrative of what happened before and what was expected to come. Building on the Hebraic tradition, Christian thinkers and pioneers adapted the moral narratives of the Bible to their own special interpretations of the divine.[2] Later, Protestant attitudes implicitly held that history moves by divinely preordained and revealed stages to the solution of human dilemmas. Gradually this attitude also infected the philosophies of modernity, coming to dominate modern theories of history and science despite a plethora of opposing voices. Notable among these opposing voices were the Romantic thinkers, among them Herder and also T.S. Eliot who did not accept the inevitability of progress as many others conceded. While everyone accepts that the notion of change is the essence of life, the disagreement is about something much more subtle but is pregnant with significant consequences.

What distinguishes a modernist from someone who is less enamored by everything modern is this: the modernist à la Fukuyama believes in the *inevitability* of progress while the opposing view would, sometimes grudgingly, concede to the *possibility* of change or progress. Progress as fortuitous, rather than as inevitable, holds the promise that change might occur in diverse and multiple forms, not the totalitarian narrative of progress driven by scientism and liberal capitalism. The deterministic or apocalyptic theory of progress locks everyone in a Weberian iron cage or in a suffocating straitjacket of a singular modernity. Ignoring this subtlety can produce some of the most irreconcilable dilemmas and offer nonoptions forcing one to choose between science versus religion, rationality versus faith, and progress versus tradition.

Many Muslim thinkers unfortunately have purchased into the inevitability of progress thesis without thinking through its implications. Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), the poet and thinker of India, also inadvertently stumbled

into some of these thorny patches. He redeemed himself with his poetry that gushed with romanticism and stirrings of the emotive self. For Iqbal's poetry differed greatly with his occasional reflections on scientific modernity that were secreted into his philosophy.

LOCATION OF WORK

In intellectual work, as in real estate, location is everything. In what context or environment one is located will to a large extent identify one's primary audience. The question of audience is a critical element in all interpretive and revisionist projects. Since progressive Islam is not only a theoretical enterprise but is also closely related to practice, location, and audience, these concerns are in many ways decisive. The loose alliance of scholars who today write about progressive Islam in North America hail from different backgrounds and contexts. Some are North American-born or naturalized citizens whose base communities are unmistakably North American. Others, in turn, work in the United States but whose primary social laboratory are communities in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East.

Part of the challenge to grasp the trajectory of progressive Islam is to comprehend the journeys that many individuals associated with this very undefined trend have undertaken through scholarship and activism. In my case, my formative work was done in South Africa and what follows is admittedly a highly truncated slice of a much more complex and detailed narrative. The selective nature of this narrative is to highlight some critical elements of the progressive Muslim struggle in the South African context.

As graduates of the seminaries or *madrasas* of India, Pakistan, and other regions of the Muslim world, several of my contemporaries like myself returned to our native land in the 1980s only to encounter a cauldron of political conflict and social injustice perpetrated by the system of apartheid. Young and inexperienced, we were yet determined to engage in the liberation struggle from an Islamic moral perspective. After all, Islamic discourse was what we knew best and to which our identities were intimately but also complexly related. While several secular organizations were available from which we could participate in the struggle for liberation, many of us also recognized the need to mobilize our communities in the language that they understood best: the language of faith and tradition.

As aspiring scholars and clerics we were convinced that Islam embodied a message of justice, equality, and freedom, a teaching we needed to internalize and practice programmatically. Our primary audience was the minority Muslim community of South Africa whom we had to remind of their moral duty and responsibility to regard legalized racial discrimination as a violation of human dignity and as sinful as if one were complicit in terms of Muslim ethics. While a section of the Muslim community was willing to embrace

this message, a larger group was content to go along with the quietist and accomodationist posture that the overwhelming majority of Muslim clerical associations had adopted by tolerating apartheid's horrors.

It was no doubt an uphill battle to persuade many individuals and the leadership in the ulama community that they erroneously deemed certain doctrines to be part of tradition, such as requiring people to obey an oppressive state. Our exigencies required that such doctrines be reviewed. Most Muslim clerics saw it as their primary duty to defend their narrow sectarian and religious interests since they did not feel any obligation to make sacrifices on behalf of a largely non-Muslim and black majority, yoked and dehumanized by decades of legalized segregationist policies and systematic violence. Needless to say, consciously and unconsciously many nonblack communities in South Africa, Muslims included, had also internalized the structural racism of the society which blinded them to the realities of an oppressive state and caused them to ignore the ethical calling of justice demanded by their faith.

For the Muslim progressives this state of affairs required a mini-revolution in traditional juridical ethics (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalam*). The need was to ensure that Muslim ethical deliberations abandoned sectarian interests and developed a humanist and inclusivist vision that embraced all human beings irrespective of color, creed, and race. This meant going against the grain of a very strong exclusivist tradition dating back to the days of Muslim empire.

What made matters a little bit easier was the visibility of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. This revolutionary message empowered disenfranchised people around the world with the promise of emancipation from authoritarian regimes and dictatorships supported by the major powers. Just as the United States was a major backer of the dethroned Pahlavi dictatorship in Iran, it also for a considerable time supported the minority white and apartheid government in Pretoria as a Cold War ally. Furthermore, around the 1980s, Muslim groups in different parts of the majority Muslim areas were also battling authoritarian governments. Solidarity with such liberatory and revolutionary movements, of course, inspired us in South Africa.

But it also dawned upon us that a progressive agenda in South Africa would be radically different from the kinds of developments occurring in Egypt, Iran, Sudan, or Pakistan. In those countries the emphasis was on the application of a full-blooded notion of Shari'a, the content of which produced bloody consequences and shocking miscarriages of justice. In South Africa our search was for a Shari'a that took into account our realities that were at once very different from those of Muslims in majority contexts.

Often we found voices located on the margins of the Muslim intellectual traditions: particularly attractive were those messages, ideas, and concepts that had resonance with our experiences. For instance, the mainstream and

canonized tradition forbade alliances with non-Muslims and harbored suspicions about our associations with Jews and Christians, given a long and unsavory history of political hostilities with these communities over centuries dating back to nascent Islam in Arabia and the Crusades. Over time these attitudes crystallized into a virtual separatist Muslim theology that at least in theory kept associations with Jews and Christians to a minimum save for some notable exceptions in Muslim Spain. In addition, narrow juridical interpretations devalued the role of women in public life and politics.

Large chunks of this inherited tradition were unhelpful to our context, leaving activists agonizing over the psychological barriers such teachings produced. Many clerics and opponents of the progressive Muslim political cause repeated the authoritative readings that they had dredged from texts in order to discredit our meager new readings. Since only scant and selected authorities—past and present—in the tradition offered any kind of help to our context, our liberation theology and juridical ethics had to rely on new readings of the Qur'an and selections from the prophetic tradition. In his noted text *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism,* Farid Esack carefully documents the outlines of our ethical struggles and demonstrates how we retrieved the messages of liberation and pluralism from the narratives of the Qur'an. In the frighteningly repressive political climate and life and death struggles that characterized South Africa, it was comforting to read that God was on the side of the oppressed and righteous who were patiently and justly steadfast in God's cause.[3]

During the 1980s we hardly had the luxury to think through the complicated issues of Muslim ethics in a systematic and theoretically rigorous manner. The Muslim equivalents to theorists such as Marx, Engels, and Lenin were the writings of Qutb, Mawdudi, and Khomeini: the latter were rhetorically persuasive but intellectually limiting, if not at times castrating.

Given the exigencies of the struggle we were instantly required to produce reliable ethical positions on a host of issues. In hindsight, our writings were humane in their vision, but thin in intellectual depth; strong on polemics but weak on politics. Critical re-readings of the tradition in a systematic manner that would enable us to theorize our lived experiences in the tradition were a luxury and in short supply at the time.

What awaits those engaged in progressive Muslim discourses in the heat of crisis is to partake in critical reflection on those experiences. Many lessons are to be learned and an equal number had to be unlearned. High priority should be given to theorizing these experiences and practices. This is a task that a range of Muslim progressives needs to accomplish with the hope that our efforts from the geographical margins, as well as the edges of intellectual power vis-à-vis the prevailing orthodoxies, could foster new debates and diversify the tradition.

PROGRESSIVE TRADITION?

Progress is Janus-faced: it has opposing sides to it. Progress also signifies a particular relation to history; that history has an end (*telos*) and a predetermined goal. In a more benign way progress could mean advances in knowledge and the acquisition of some abilities and the loss of others, without making this contingent on the philosophy of history. In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* Benjamin meditates on the painting of the Swiss painter, Paul Klee (d. 1940), called the *Angelus Novus.* The image of the angel is for Benjamin the beguiling image of the angel of history. Here Benjamin's caution and deep ambivalence toward historicism surfaces strongly, for in his view the adherents of historicism, like Fukuyama, tend to empathize with the victors in history.

What intrigues Benjamin in the Klee painting is *how* the angel flies: his wings are spread but his face is turned towards the past. The wings of the angel cannot close because they are kept open by a violent storm from Paradise that propels him into the future. With a strong dose of irony, Benjamin comments: "This storm is what we call progress."[4]

At the very time when the helpless angel of history is pushed into the future by the storm of progress from Paradise, he heroically and against the odds resists the storm by turning his face towards the past. The turning back is suggestive of history and tradition, both of which Benjamin believes will restrain a hubristic and a runaway idea of progress.

In order to avoid the negative sense of the word "progress," says Benjamin, one needs to resist some senses of the word.[5] To understand "progress" as involving the transformation of the entirety of humankind is a hubristic posture, to say the least. Yes, indeed, one can acknowledge human advances in ability and knowledge. But to view progress as meaning the infinite perfectibility of humankind in competition with nature sits oddly with the notions of humility and balance advocated in Muslim ethical discourse. Of course, the struggle to reach moral and spiritual perfection is at the very core of Muslim ethical teaching but is very different to a historicist notion of perfection.

For some progressives knowledge of the tradition is important. I do not advocate that one should view knowledge of the tradition as sacred and unchanging; rather, it is subject to interrogation, correction, and advancement. For the upshot of all knowledge is not that it should be adored and worshipped but that it must be put to use and result in ethical practice. Therefore, the major question, if not the most challenging one that arises is whether a practice has to perpetually resemble its origin. The answer to this rhetorical question is not easily soluble: the answer is negotiated in the tradition, the state of *what* one is, and more importantly, *how* one exists.

One thing is for sure: tradition is definitely not a collection of texts. That would be only one source of knowledge of the tradition. Tradition is a state

of mind and a set of embodied practices. As practice, tradition undoubtedly has authority and operates by certain rules of the game. Tradition, to use the felicitous words of Pierre Bourdieu, is what the body learned or what was "learned by body"; it is not something one acquires like knowledge, but *what* one is.[6] Put differently, one could say that tradition is the self-intelligibility of the past in the present; a continuously evolving and mutating intelligibility or state of being. One could also say that tradition has everything to do with one's subjectivity.

The critical element, in order to be a person of tradition, is to have a historical sense "not only of the pastness of the past," as T.S. Eliot noted, "but of its presence."[7] The notion of tradition implies more than an awareness of the temporal and the timeless. To be a person of tradition one must conceive of the temporal and timeless together; one must acutely become aware of one's place in time and of one's own contemporaneity. Instead of living in the present, a writer or thinker who engages with tradition lives in the "present moment of the past" and shows an awareness, in Eliot's words, "not of what is dead, but of what is already living." Since tradition in Islam is so much about practices, it is then those practices that are learned by the body. Tradition, like the body, does not memorize the past but "enacts the past, bringing it back to life."[8]

Tradition is unlike palingenesis where certain organisms only reproduce their ancestral characters without modification. Rather tradition works more like kenogenesis: it describes how in biology an organism derives features from the immediate environment in order to modify the hereditary development of a germ or organism.

If tradition has fallen into disrepute, it is because some who claim to be traditionalist practitioners think of tradition, not as dynamic practices, but rather confuse the knowledge of the tradition with tradition itself. From such a perspective, tradition is reduced to a set of memories. Under trying and negative circumstances, these memories give rise to self-pitying nostalgia. Since some representatives of contemporary Muslim orthodoxy happily confuse knowledge with tradition, they err in imagining tradition to be immune to environmental influences. Hence, seminal figures and agents in the history of tradition are turned into unique and idealized personalities in an almost mythical past. In this scheme, history is elevated to mythology and the human beings who authored tradition are turned into hagiographical figures, beyond the scrutiny of historical evidence. It is this excessive reverence for the past, in my view, that in fact paralyzes dogmatic traditionalists. Paradoxically, what happens within the ostensible centers of traditionalism is that time is flattened and homogenized. Unfortunately, time looses its density and complex nature and is reduced to a secular version with a superficial overlay of piety.

One of the hallmarks of the ideology of progress, one that violently militates against notions of tradition, is that it considers and imagines time as being homogenous and empty. Subtly, such a notion of time eradicates

difference: differences between people and in human experiences. In turn, it inspires the fantasy of a utopian historical process driving all nations toward the secular and hurtling toward an undifferentiated modernity. What differentiates the modern style—for that is what modernity really is, a style rather than a rupture—as opposed to its predecessors is the fundamental shift in the notion of time, which is antithetical to persons of tradition.

In the imagination of modernity, Reinhart Koselleck tells us, ‘‘Time is no longer simply the medium in which all histories take place, it gains a historical quality. Consequently, history no longer occurs in, but through time. Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right.’’[9] By dynamic he means that time is credited with creative force, not with will and desire. And, in order to continuously create and re-create this dynamism, time must become singular and homogenous. In other words, time is no longer the vehicle in which history occurred, but rather time has become the driver who is on autopilot. All the passengers in the vehicle are completely at the driver’s mercy. The passengers have no will to decide which cars, makes, or models they will drive since the driver cannot take instructions for he is a factory-made automaton! Where conceptions of time were once shaped by the specificities of distinct environments, rhythms, and rituals, now these are eroded.

On this front Muslim progressives must be extremely cautious. If there is a wish to engage knowledge of tradition, one should resist the desire to reduce traditions to ‘‘things,’’ or a ‘‘single’’ interpretation, and deem tradition as only ‘‘one’’ practice. While certain forms of dogmatic traditionalism often portray themselves as the singular and authentic voices of Islam, a more careful investigation of Muslim knowledge traditions would often show that the very issues in question have been debated, contested, and disagreed upon and hence, less authoritarian. However, when tradition itself is imagined as a kind of prefabricated design of being then it is a sure sign of traditionalists gone berserk, obsessed with power but paradoxically also dressed in the imperial garb of the modern. This is what I would call designer traditionalism.

Progressives should heed the caution of Michel Serres and his student Bruno Latour and not fall prey to something we all fall prey to from time to time: the issue of period-dating. Seventeenth century intellectual thought (a product of critique-thinking) artificially separated the modern from the premodern.[10] Early science and capitalism, Latour points out, needed to engage in a reductionist philosophy in order to constitute reality into a nature-culture division with the view to accelerate technological-scientific advances. Making such arbitrary divisions in a ‘‘work of purification’’ was now indefensible. It arbitrarily splits objects from subjects and separates nature/earth from human/science. Ironically, this valuable insight itself assaults the term ‘‘progress,’’ for progress facilitates the false separation since it assumes that its opposite is static. (I have already explained that I use the term under protest.)

A great responsibility rests on the shoulders of progressives to revive tradition in all its vibrancy, intelligibility, and diversity. One might have to avoid the error made by some Christian and Jewish thinkers and schools of thought who uncritically bought into the inevitability thesis of progress.

Here I wish to offer the view that one should begin to aspire to the *possibility* of progress by engaging the knowledge of tradition without marginalizing it or neglecting its wisdom. Indeed, most people who think of themselves as traditionalists might be surprised to learn that every enactment of tradition also involves a critique. A progressive intellectual posture involves a critical interrogation of the conveyerbelt of tradition, namely texts, practices, and histories, by posing a series of questions to the inherited knowledges of the tradition. In other words, a critical Muslim or a progressive Muslim is also engaged in critical traditionalism. Critique of tradition is not to debunk tradition, but it is rather an introspection of what one is: a continuous questioning of one's being. Recall that I earlier said that tradition is all about what one is: it is more than identity, more than texts and practices, more than history. It is all that, plus more: the additional element remains undefined, but it involves all those things that make one feel that you belong.

TRANSITIONS, NOT CONCLUSIONS: KNOWLEDGES IN THE *DIHLIZ* (INTERSTICE)

Throughout this chapter I have not discussed the specifics as to what the content of anything conceivably called progressive Islam should look like. That was intentional. Rather, I reflected on my experiences in encountering the knowledge of tradition and tried to provide some "after the fact" theoretical reflections and self-critique. There is a reason why I am reluctant to be prescriptive about content. If the progressive movement is going to be prescriptive, then it is going to end up in a one-size fits all version of progressive Islam with predictable disasters in tow. Once one advocates a specific content for progressive Islam, then it becomes an institution with ideological interests that will cauterize its dynamism. And, from a practical point of view if progressives are going to take upon themselves the institutional representation, they take on a burden greater than they can bear. One can hardly forecast all scenarios and contexts in one country or region, let alone do advocacy for a global audience. Rather, I view the momentum toward progressive Islam to be a catalyst for other existing tendencies in Islam, not as a replacement. In fact, progressives must engage and challenge the existing practices and interpretations as members of those communities and not as a separate church or tendency whose credentials are questioned because of a certain aloofness from the larger communities. This is the hard and more challenging part of being an advocate of progressive Islam since it is easy to preach and work with like-minded people. The challenge is to

engage people with whom one disagrees. Second, I fear that once progressive practices of Islam are institutionalized and imposed from the top, it will have a number of deleterious effects. Like the well-intentioned labors of Muslim modernists a century ago, progressive Muslims run the risk of becoming servants of power. The state-driven modernizing of Islam has turned Muslim modernists into partners and servants of the most brutal authoritarian regimes from Egypt to Pakistan, and from Tunisia to Indonesia. Muslim progressives might have to consider the value of entering the democratic base of their societies rather than placating elites. Needless to say, this is much easier said than done and a great deal more thought has to be invested to configure the most effective strategies. Third, Muslim progressives must avoid running the risk of appearing to confect some version of a civilizing mission for Muslims. Showing vigilance for the designs of power to co-opt progressives for Neo-conservative, imperialist, or nationalist projects, be they Islamic or non-Islamic is a first step. Continuous self-critique and debate will help us avoid repeating the missteps that our well-meaning predecessors committed.

Critical or progressive approaches to the practice of Islam, especially questions directed at the knowledge traditions together with their relevant answers, are determined by specific contexts. In fact, the context is an undeniable part of the question of practice; it imprints itself on the tradition. To provide prescriptive answers from outside that specific context would be a colonizing posture to be avoided at all costs. Yet, it is an altogether different matter if people in one context wish to learn from the experiences of another context in order not to reinvent the wheel in analogous issues. In such a case, when people do accept the insights derived from another experience, then they do so voluntarily without dictation from outside and they own the idea and practice as their own.

By allowing the interpretation and practice of Islam to be context-driven one also ensures a robust diversity and pluralism. But more importantly, it takes the experiences of each context seriously. While the idea and practice of Islam were inspired by nonhistorical impulses of prophecy and revelation, everything after that initial moment occurs in the full light of history. For this reason it is imperative that Islamic norms be informed by peoples' historical experiences. Thus, if interfaith dialogue and solidarity, and gender justice were burning issues in the South Africa of the 1980s, to cite one example, then it does not mean that these would be the same priorities in the twenty-first century. Hypothetically, Muslims in Egypt may well deem political pluralism and justice to be their urgent priorities, while in America women's access to mosques and the right to religious leadership might be regarded as urgent.

Often practices and experiences are not driven by clear-cut theories and policies that are applied in sanitized environments. To the contrary, practices are produced in much messier contexts and contingent circumstances. In recounting the experiences of Muslim progressives in South Africa,

I observed that theoretical reflection was a luxury and more often than not, practical necessity, common sense, and ethical vision coupled with a certain pragmatism informed our practices in that specific theater of struggle. Theory usually occurs after practice, just like the disciplines of legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*) and the theory of theology (*usul al-din* or *ʿilm al-kalam*) emerged as theoretical reflections after the practice of law, ethics and speculative theology had been in vogue for some time.

Theory is necessary for several reasons. One of the more obvious needs for theory is to provide some intellectual coherence and social intelligibility to existing practices. Theory has the ability to finesse and sharpen the rationales underlying practices and also to refine practices. And, theory makes complicated ideas and experiences accessible and digestible for pedagogical ends. Universality of ideas and practices combined with the brevity of abstraction facilitates easy transmission from one context to another. Evidently, the plurality of theories inherited from the past and those manufactured in the present constitute tangible evidence of the different Muslim experiences that need to be sustained at all costs if one wishes to avoid totalitarian outcomes in religious thought.

A plurality of experiences is borne due to differences in knowledge. The fallibility of human knowledge is made manifest in the inescapable diversity and hybridity of knowledge. Fallibility is an imperfection but a necessary one that makes the search for knowledge imperative. No wonder that some of the best exemplars of the Islamic tradition starting from the Prophet, the Companions to later figures like Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), Abu al-Walid Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE), Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi (d. 1240 CE) made a virtue of intellectual promiscuity. Ghazali demonstrated this diversity in his monumental writings, pressing the value of in-between space (*dihliz*) of daily living and reflection.[11] The spatial metaphor of a threshold or portal, a *dihliz*—an intermediate portal separating the Persian home from its exterior—is also a productive dialogical space. From Ghazali and countless others we learn how intellectual productivity was enhanced at the interstices of cultures. Ghazali imagined and theorized all thought and practice to be a continuous dialogical movement between the inner and the outer; the esoteric and the exoteric; body and spirit in a productive fashion. He did not configure the dialogic in a simplistic binary relation but imagined these to be the polarities of a force field.

Suspended within this force field was the subject diligently tending to the needs of both matter and spirit. Underlying all our critical activity is a complex hybridity and fuzziness, despite our every pretension to smooth it out. And while over the longer duration we can sometimes observe dramatic shifts in knowledge, on most occasions we pass through transitions, creases, and folds in knowledge and time.

The perpetual quest is to seek emergent knowledge arising out of our struggles and transitions for alternative futures. We do know one thing

taught by experience: that the dominant paradigms need to be continuously contested with alternative ways of knowing, different types of knowledge and models for society building. The future, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos pointed out, has become a personal question for us, a question of life and death.[12] In order to pursue such futures we also need to resort to the past not as a ready-made solution, but as a creative problem susceptible to opening up new possibilities. "Certainly we need history," Nietzsche wrote. "But our need for history is quite different from that of the spoiled idler in the garden of knowledge," he continued, adding: "...[W]e require history for life and action, not for the smug avoiding of life and action, or even to whitewash a selfish life and cowardly, bad acts."[13]

Both Ghazali and Ibn Arabi, just like Nietzsche later, were compelled to reread the past as a prophecy that would change the present. Unfortunately, too many thinkers have understood the progress of civilization in stoutly economistic terms linking the division of labor to the development of society. It may well be part of the truth, but certainly not the whole of the truth. But it is the prophetic activity dedicated to life that we seek in its intensities. A life premised on balance and distribution is necessary in order to avoid the nihilistic end that beckons without it. The progress we make in giving shape to that prophetic spirit—a life of practice and will to power—opens up the *possibilities* of new histories, not their inevitability and least of all the end of history, which is in reality a disguised theology of eschatology unique to a certain Christian worldview, but not necessarily shared by all. It is precisely because of the possibility of history and the will to power that Fukuyama's end of history prophecy, now running aground in the ruins of Mesopotamia and the Hindu Kush mountains as well as in the ashes of the World Trade Center in New York, proves that he was so grotesquely wrong. The neoconservatives and liberal capitalists who are riding the crest of history for now are confident about the inevitability of progress. But will their terminus also signal the crash of civilization? For those who view history as a continuous struggle, a gift carrying the possibilities of progress, the cultivation of civilization remains inviting and utterly tempting.[14]

NOTES

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3. Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: Towards an Islamic Perspective of Inter-Religious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld Publications, 1997).

4. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 257–258.

5. Ibid., 260–261.

6. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 73.

7. T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot,* ed. Frank Kermode (London, U.K.: Faber & Faber, 1975), 38.

8. Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice.*

9. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time,* trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, U.K.: The MIT Press, 1985), 246.

10. Donald Wesling, "Michael Serres, Bruno Latour, and the Edges of Historical Periods," *CLIO: Journal of Literature, History and the Philosophy of History* 26, no. 2 (1997): 200.

11. Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

12. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Toward a New Common Sense: Law, Science and Politics in the Paradigmatic Transition* (New York and London, U.K.: Routledge, 1995).

13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,* trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 7.

14. Ahmet Karamustafa, "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld, 2003).

7

Sexual Diversity in Islam

Scott Sirajul Haqq Kugle

In the name of God, the compassionate One, the One who cares. Praise be to the singular One by whose will diversity was created and to whose unique Oneness all bewildering multiplicity points in signs, for that One promises, "We will show them [human beings] our signs, upon the horizons and within themselves" (Qur'an 41:53).

I became a Muslim in response to the moral challenge of the Qur'an. Over years of study and reflection, I was drawn to its vision of human responsibility in the cosmos whose diversity and multiplicity testifies to the unity of the One who creates and sustains. The ethical challenge to form a just community that respects and encourages diversity is a key component of its message. One of the most pressing ethical challenges for adherents of all religions in contemporary times is how to respond to diversity in sexuality and gender identity, that is how they respond to lesbian, gay, and transgendered members of their religion. Muslims are not exempt from this challenge, though many flee it. However, when Muslims face the issues squarely, they find that the Qur'an offers many resources to creatively, compassionately and caringly address sexuality and gender diversity.

Diversity in the world is a fact. Pluralism is a political response to that fact, asserting that the moral order should promote respect and dignity for all, despite diversity, difference and division. We often associate pluralism with "secularism," but it is not in principle antagonistic to religion, for Muslims in Indonesia and India have developed a definition of secularism as pluralistic religious devotion. From an Islamic orientation, one can advocate "tawhidic pluralism," a religious response to diversity that embraces pluralism as a positive moral state, acknowledging that a single God purposefully creates and nurtures a cosmos and humanity characterized by deep diversity. My approach in this chapter is that promoting dignifying respect, mutual responsibility, and reciprocal care for all despite their diversity is the way to witness the oneness of God (*tawhid*).

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

Who am I to write this essay? To better help my readers understand what I write, it is important to specify from what position I speak. I am an American Muslim who grew up in a largely Christian environment but has lived and worked many years in Islamic environments (from Muslim majority contexts like Morocco and Pakistan to Muslim minority contexts like Canada and India). I am a scholar of Islamic religion and culture, with a Ph.D. in Religious Studies, basic training in Islamic disciplines of knowledge (*usul al-din* including the Qur'an, Hadith, and *fiqh*), and the ability to read and translate Islamic texts in Arabic, Persian and Urdu. I belong to the often-oppressed and silenced minority of homosexuals who, along with transgendered people, exist in all cultures though in different roles. I myself identify as a gay man who was "out" before I became a Muslim and am still a gay man after having become a Muslim—some things do not change. In my experience, being gay is a deeply embedded element of one's personality. I find strength in knowing that I am not alone; as more people who are raised as Muslims find the courage to accept their homosexuality and build support and advocacy groups, they are joined by increasing numbers of homosexual women and men who have converted to the faith.[1]

How I can be both a Muslim and a gay, people often ask—this is both a naïve question and a profound one. Speaking frankly, sexual orientation was simply not an issue in my conversion, which was inspired by the Qur'anic vision of the universal message of all religions. But I tell those who ask that it all depends on what kind of Islam one adopts, for it is no longer a simple matter to be a Muslim, if it ever was. What kind of Muslim am I? The violent and crisis-ridden times we are living in demand that we give a complex answer to that question. I am a non-sectarian Sunni with a progressive approach to religion. I value the Shari'a for how its ritual worship offers a means to live an ethically engaged life based upon intellectual principles guided toward humane goals. I approach law (*fiqh*) as a follower of Abu Hanifa (d. 767 CE) and I am a reformist within the Hanafi legal method (*madhhab*) that values rational assessment of traditional sources like hadith reports as essential to the growth and internal renewal of Shari'a. I approach theology (*kalam*) as an admirer of Maturidi (d. 944 CE), who forged a middle way between extreme rationalists (like the Mu'tazila) and dogmatic literalists (like the Hashawis of the past and the Hanbalis and Salafis of the present), for Maturidi never abandoned dialectic between reason and revelation to achieve human justice, as the Sunnis mainly did. I uphold the rational observation of philosophy/science as a student of Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE), who affirmed that the natural world is in harmony with revelation and that revelation should be interpreted in ways guided by reason and scientific discovery, not just tradition. I approach ethics (*akhlaq*) as an adherent of Nizam al-Din Awliya (d. 1325 CE), a Sufi exemplar who taught a delicate balance of love

and justice, in which the sincerest way to worship the One who creates all is to care for the vulnerable with selfless humility.

This is who I am, as shaped by my teachers, religious exemplars, and spiritual ancestors in Islam. Because I was not born into a Muslim family, I have had greater need to find ancestors and specify who they are and why I follow them. If any Muslim tries, she or he can clarify ancestors who have shaped her or his personality, religious sensibility, and practical method of Islam. I think this is an ethical necessity, to clearly state who we follow and why, so as not to abdicate responsibility and blindly imitate our parents, friends, or local leaders (*taqlid*). Both reason and sincerity urge us to critically examine our beliefs so that we will not repeat what the Qur'an condemns: "Surely we found our parents of that persuasion, and only by their footsteps do we guide ourselves!" (Qur'an 43:23).

Most people cling to presumptions when it comes to issues of sexuality and gender, and feel that they already know "what Islam says" without reflecting on whether they based their opinion on patriarchal culture or knowledge of religion. Maturidi eloquently specifies how we know about religion: "The principle of what we know as religion—for it is necessary that people have a religion upon which they come together and a principle to which they take recourse—has two dimensions, namely transmitted tradition (*sam'*) and discerning reason (*'aql*)."[2] We come to know the reality of anything, including religion, through three means: what we sense directly (*'ayan*), what we learn from others (*akhbar*), and what we deduce by reasoned research (*nazar*). We know of religion mainly through learning from others, for we know the Qur'an by continuous and multiple transmission to us (*tawatur*), vouchsafed by the Prophet Muhammad's honesty about what he sensed directly; similarly we know of the Prophet's behavior through hadith reports transmitted by people who witnessed his words and actions, some of which may have reliable transmission but many of which do not. However, we can never reduce religion down to transmitted tradition, as comforting as that would be to many who seek security in the world from the world. In accepting tradition and especially acting upon it, we need to rely on reason. As Maturidi teaches us, "The human being is specially endowed with the moral responsibility to manage the affairs of the created world, to meet people's needs through labor, to seek the most beneficial circumstances for their powers of reason and choose what is best for them and while protecting them from what is contrary to this—there is no way to achieve this except by using discernment through reasoned researched into the nature of things.... For reason gives us evidence of the reality of things and leads us to grasp their meaning in the same way we rely upon sight to recognize color, hearing to understand sound, and each sense to perceive the reality we experience. We rely on reason for understanding just like we rely on our senses for perception, and there is no power but with God."[3]

Many values we Muslims commonly attribute to Islam do not come from the most highly revered sources of the religion (foremost the Qur'an) but rather from patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is the ideology instituting dominance of elder straight males over all others, specifically women of all ages, younger men, and minority males who do not accept patriarchal roles that reinforce masculine power. As observed by Islamic feminists, patriarchy existed before the advent of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's example, which deeply challenged it. In later generations after the Prophet's death, Muslims built the Shari'a in ways that inscribed patriarchal values deep into Islamic culture, compromising the Qur'an's ethical voice. Because of this, Muslims for many centuries did not seriously consider either the issue of women's equality with men, did not allow dignified roles for homosexual persons or countenance transgendered persons in Muslim communities. Rapid changes in society under the impact of modernity, along with advances in scientific knowledge in the fields of psychology, sociology, and genetic biology, make reassessing the classical Shari'a a vital necessity. In addition, the voices of previously marginalized minorities, like women, lesbian, gay, and transgendered Muslims, insist on justice after such a long imposed silence. Previously marginalized groups offer important ethical insights into non-patriarchal interpretations of Islamic scripture, insights not available to those who have not suffered similar experiences of existential exclusion.

The goal of this chapter is to show that homosexual and transgendered Muslims exist, that they speak in a voice which offers a constructive and reformist critique of classical Islamic thought, and that Islamic theology has previously untapped resources to comprehend them and give them a dignified role in contemporary Islamic communities.[4] As Maturidi reminds us above, our sincere practice of Islam depends upon constant application of "discernment through reasoned research into the nature of things." Such research may change our view of religion depending on new developments in politics, social organization, and scientific understanding. All these things impact our view of sexuality and homosexuality, and demand that we apply reason to scripture and traditional custom.

DIVERSITY AND SEXUALITY

The Qur'an assesses diversity as a positive reality in the created nature of things. Diversity and multiplicity in the cosmos, in humanity, and between social groups is an integral part of God's creative will. It is an indispensable challenge to moral systems. Islamic feminists have explored the Qur'anic description of gender, such as "O people, stay aware of your Lord who created you all from a single self and created from it its mate and spread from those two many men and women" (Qur'an 4:1). The creation of women was not a mistake, a lessening of the moral standard, or a faulty copying of

the perfect male, all of which were suggested by later patriarchal interpretations of Islam encoded in the Shari'a.[5] Diversity in gender is intimately related to diversity in human communities between tribes, sects, nations, and civilizations: "O people, We created you all from a male and female and made you into different communities and different tribes, so that you should come to know one another, acknowledging that the most noble among you is the one most aware of Allah" (Qur'an 49:13). There is a moral purpose behind the single God's creation of conflicting human types: it challenges us to restrain our egoistic aggrandizement, practice ethical compassion toward others, protect the vulnerable in their socially-defined difference, and through this stay conscious of God's presence. "If God had willed, God would have made you one single community, but rather God brings whomever God wills within divine compassion—yet the unjust oppressors have no guardian and no helper" (Qur'an 42:8).

Our human diversity that is so often a cause for exclusion and violence, is actually God's way of challenging us to rise up to the demands of justice beyond the limitation of our individual egoism and communal chauvinism. Deep diversity confronts us with a bewildering pattern of differentiation. Yet difference too often leads us to exclude others in hopes of building a firm community or with ambition to create a hierarchy of power to assert some moral order. However, the Qur'an warns us against going to extremes to exclude others, reminding us that not a single life is dispensable: "Whoever kills an innocent life, it is as if he had killed all of humanity. And whoever gives life to one, it is as if he had revived all of humanity. We have sent them our prophets with clear teaching, but subsequently many of them have gone willfully astray" (Qur'an 5:32). All people, despite their apparent and real differences, are part of a greater whole; safeguarding the dignity of each is essential to achieving one's own dignity and upholding the rights of each is integral to securing justice for oneself.

The diversity of human communities comes not just from appearance, which our society's racial ideology commonly associates with skin color (for Muslim societies are not immune from racism or the institution of slavery), but also from the subtler hues of language and shades of belief. The Qur'an says, "One of God's signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and your colors, in which there are signs for those who know" (Qur'an 30:22). The Qur'anic term for "color," in the richness of Arabic metaphors, could refer not just to visible hues, but also to other different sensations like the "taste" of different dishes of food or aromas.[6] Our diversity as human beings goes much deeper than the color of the skin or surface appearance but rather extends into the inner core of our personalities where language, concepts, beliefs and experiences lie. With such a radically positive assessment of human diversity on the epistemological and ethical levels, one can justifiably wonder whether the Qur'an addresses diversity in sexuality as well.

What do we mean by sexuality? Deep in the core of the human personality lies our sense of sexuality, which is far more subtle and pervasive than just sexual acts. By sexuality, we mean a kind of self-awareness that is not just an urge (like lust) but also a passion that grants us emotional fulfillment, sparks in us expansive joy and urges us toward existential coming-to-completeness through encountering another person in a way that unites body, soul, and spirit. Sexual acts bring us as close as possible to "tasting" another person, not just in bodily sensations but also in terms of comprehending the other person's sense of self. Just like tasting food, one comes to sense another's presence by taking her or him into one's own body, dissolving the barrier between self and other through harmonious movement, intense intimacy, and ecstatic rapture. This is why sexual acts are so powerful, and why sexuality is such an intimate part of each individual's personality and an integral component in each person's appreciation of beauty or apprehension of emotional intensity.

Sexuality is made up of many components, making its manifestation in any individual unique. These components include strength of sex drive, frequency of sexual contact, a continuum of style from aggressively passionate to delicately tender, and variation in intensity of response. Of course, an integral component of sexuality is sexual orientation, that is whether one is attracted to a partner of the same gender or the opposite gender (or perhaps to both and possibly to neither). Is this concept found in scripture or in Islam? What we term "sexuality" was discussed by classical Islamic theologians and jurists in ways detailed later in this chapter; however, they did not reflect systematically on what we call "sexual orientation." Before we turn to their opinions, upon which the classical Islamic tradition is based, we need to develop a sufficiently subtle model, based on the Qur'an, for understanding personality and how sexual orientation is related to it.

NATURE AND PERSONALITY

Sexual orientation is one of the "color" differences that make people distinct from each other. Yet those who oppose homosexuality call it "un-natural" or against human nature. In contrast, homosexuals attest that it is an expression of their innate personality and sense of self that is so deep as to be beyond the rational capacity to alter. This attestation is supported by clinical research of professional psychiatric associations, which have removed homosexuality from the category of "personality disorder" and disavowed techniques previously claimed to be able to "correct" sexual orientation. Clearly, the argument is over what constitutes human nature. From an Islamic perspective, we can ask how does God create human beings? What roles do sexuality and orientation play in the personality? Do human beings "choose" their sexual orientation? Is it alterable by choice or habit?

Are we morally accountable for sexual orientation if is part of the subrational elements of personality? The questions raised are profound and the answers are not obvious.

Modern psychiatry increasingly holds sexual orientation to be an inherent part of an individual's personality, elements of which may be genetic, influenced by hormonal balances in the womb, and shaped by early childhood experiences, the cumulative effects of which unfold during adolescence and early adulthood. Most psychiatrists in the West (and increasingly among professionals in Muslim communities) hold that the attitude toward one's sexual orientation is largely cultural and that behavior based upon one's sexual orientation is subject to rational control and clinical modification, but the underlying sexual orientation is not. In premodern times, philosophers also observed that sexual orientation was largely determined outside the choice of the individual; lacking knowledge of genes, hormones, and psychiatric research, they usually speculated that determination was by astrological influences.[7] The personal accounts of lesbian and gay Muslims testify to the early and deep feeling of being different, followed by long and difficult struggles to understand that this difference was due to homosexual orientation and to find ways of explaining this to family and friends while striving for emotional satisfaction within the limits of one's sexual possibilities. In contrast, Muslim communities are undecided as to whether to accept modern psychiatric research. One gay Muslim who grew up in Syria, Muhammad Omar Nahas, visited several psychiatrists to seek a "cure" for his homosexuality, and found some of them advocating therapy to change his sexual orientation while others held that only behavior could be changed not one's internal disposition.[8]

As professionals in Muslim communities slowly adopt clinical approaches based on research and modern medicine, they will advocate a nonjudgmental approach. At the same time, Neo-Traditionalist Muslims caricature homosexuality as a crime, a disease, or an addiction and have a wide audience. Many Muslims are willing to accept modern medical knowledge and techniques in an *ad hoc* manner, to solve particular problems, but shy away from developing a coherent theory of the human personality, based either upon medical practices and scientific discoveries or upon their own religious scripture. However, Muslim theologians, especially the Sufis among them, developed a theory of personality that most contemporary Muslims who oppose homosexuality ignore. We must continue to build upon their insights, to integrate into them new complexities revealed by contemporary psychiatry, so that our notions of morality are firmly grounded in the reality of human personality.

Personality is made up of many levels, and in my understanding of the Qur'an I find reference to at least four: outer appearance, inward disposition, genetic pattern, and inner conscience. The outer form in which we appear is *sura,* as the Qur'an says, "O human being, what has deceived you from your

Generous Lord who created you well-shaped and balanced you and set you into whatever form [*sura*] God desired'' (Qur'an 82:6–8). Many other verses describe the stages in which God creates each person's form or *sura*, in the mother's womb as a physical growth and later after breathing into it of the spirit, as a new being with consciousness, and continuing to develop and grow through birth, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. *Sura* unfolds into fullness as we reach adulthood and act autonomously as moral agents and are held accountable for our actions. However, our personality consists of far more than our outward appearance and rational actions.

From experiences in infancy and childhood, each person develops an inward disposition, a set of traits, potentials, or characteristics that are more or less innate, which the Qur'an calls *shakila*. This disposition determines how we react to experiences, as profoundly as shaping our potential to have faith. ''We reveal of the Qur'an that which is healing and compassion for the believers yet which gives the oppressors nothing but loss. When we bless people they turn away and act proudly, but when harm brushes them, they despair. So say, 'All act according to their own disposition [*shakila*], yet your Lord knows best who is on the most guided path''' (Qur'an 17:82–83). Disposition is made up of factors beyond our conscious decision and often beyond our awareness: childhood experiences, infant memories, emotional, and intellectual capabilities. In short, it is our psyche through which the ego manifests itself.

Through contemporary science, we are discovering that genetic patterns in our biological material not only determine our outward form but also greatly affects psychic disposition. Genetic inheritance is a third level of our personality. The Qur'an refers to this material substrate of organic life by pronouncing ''We created the human being from a quintessence of clay'' (Qur'an 23:12). In Arabic, this is called *tabi'a* (one's ''physical stamp'' that determines one's temperamental nature), a term adopted not from the Qur'an but from Greek science. From this genetic stamp embedded deep in our organic tissue, the Qur'an depicts the development from zygote to fetus to infant, referring to this intimate relationship between genetic material, biological organism, and moral agency: ''Then we made the human being a spermazoid firmly embedded, then we created from the spermazoid a clot of mucus and created from the mucus a lump of flesh, then created from the flesh bones, then clothed the bones with muscle, then we transformed it into another creation—so blessed be God, the best of creators!'' (Qur'an 13:14). As a Muslim, I uphold that the choices we make based upon genetic potential and constrained within environmental limitations generate our moral worth. I certainly do not argue that genetics determines everything about us in a way that excuses moral failings, any more than I would agree with a deterministic theology that imagines that God wills the corrupt and unjust oppressors into hell by *fiat* (a position toward which much of classical Islamic theology veers dangerously close). However, moral worth must not

be prejudged, and each person must be given a reasonable chance to assess her or his potential for growth and ground for sincerity, based upon a realistic, reasonable and compassionate assessment of one's own position and personality: "God does not make persons responsible for what is beyond their capacity" (Qur'an 2:233; 6:152; 7:42; 23:62). For everyone has the capacity to apprehend God, as the Qur'an optimistically affirms.

This is the fourth layer of personality, one's inner conscience nestled subtly within one's outer appearance and accessible only through one's inward disposition. This is the part of our personality in which our true humanity lies. It is our original nature or *fitra,* the deep core of our being that touches on the spirit and stays aware of the presence of God. Our outer form may grow and decay while our inward disposition may become refined or lapse into rawness, but our inner conscience remains fresh if our awareness is not distracted from it. "Set your face to the moral challenge [*din*] in a pure way, according to the original nature of God upon which [God] based humanity, for there is no changing the creation of God" (Qur'an 30:30). We were created to be aware of God's presence (through all of God's qualities, majestic, and awe-inspiring qualities as well as beautiful and love-invoking qualities), and nobody is excluded from this original nature that is never lost. This *fitra* provides us with our conscience; it is the seat of intention and sincerity by which actions will be judged for their moral worth, as the Prophet is reported to have taught: "Surely actions are by intentions and each will get that for which they intend."[9]

Sexual acts, too, should be judged by the intention with which they are performed, an intention formed within the heart of sincerity and fully colored by the filter of inward disposition before being expressed through the physicality of apparent action. Sexual orientation is latent within each individual, emerging in complex interactions between the genetic *tabiʿa* and early childhood *shakila*. Current research is pushing slowly but steadily toward the conclusion that sexual orientation is largely inherent, psychiatrists investigating early childhood experience and biochemists discovering hormonal influence during fetal development and genetic inheritance even before birth. The truth probably lies between the two, but in any case sexual orientation is firmly in place before rational thought or adolescent maturity. Judging sexual acts without a theory of sexuality will lead to injustice and will betray the most fundamental Islamic teaching that actions are assessed by the intention behind them.

SEXUAL DESIRE IN THE QUR'AN

Classical Islamic theologians and jurists interpreted the Qur'an without a theory of sexual orientation. Although the Prophet's life provided a model of sexuality and positive morality, they mainly discussed sexuality in negative

terms, as the power of lust (*quwwa shahwaniyya*). For example, Fakhr al-Din Razi (d. 1209 CE) claims that the power of lust leads to unrestrained and immoral acts, including sex but not unique to it.[10] The key term in their discussion is *shahwa,* meaning lust or sensual desire. However, the Qur'an uses this term in nuanced ways, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively, to mean desire as appetite, the pleasurable delight of consuming. The Qur'an uses *shahwa* as a verb in conjunction with food as well as sex, pleasures as that promised to souls in heaven, the absence of which torments souls in hell.[11] On a more worldly level, the Qur'an warns of *shahwa* as desire for all domestic delights that give the soul satisfaction and the body ease, which if unbridled can become lustful: "Made beautiful to people is the love of desires, for women and children and treasures hoarded of gold and silver and well-bred horses and livestock and crops—that is a transient worldly life given them by their lord, but with God is the best return" (Qur'an 3:14). Clearly, *shahwa* as lust is harmful, for it distracts one from God's presence, incites greed, and leads to committing immoral deeds. "Desires" appear in the plural, to show the variety of directions in which lust can move: toward food, sex, pride in family (the mention of children), wealth (gold and silver, livestock and crops), status and power (horses).

These objects of desire are not bad nor is the pleasurable enjoyment of them, so they are not prohibited in themselves. Rather, the psychic state of the desire, *shahwa,* makes such enjoyment lustful. Bodily pleasures can be saturated with egoistic pleasures, and the Qur'an juxtaposes the term *shahwa* with another *bagha*, meaning ardent desire or covetousness.[12] *Bagha* is less about bodily pleasure or concupiscence and more about getting egoistic satisfaction, getting one's way.[13] Yet the Qur'an asserts that seeking and desiring is not bad in itself but depends upon its intent and sincerity. If one seeks and desires while acknowledging the bounty of God (*fadl*) and giving thanks for getting one's way (*shukr*) without damaging others (*darar*) or transgressing their rights (*huquq*), then braving the dangerous waves of desire may not be reprehensible: "It is God who made subservient the sea, that you may eat from it fresh flesh and extract from it ornaments to wear, thus you see the ships cleaving through it, that you might seek your desires from God's bounty and that you may give thanks" (Qur'an 16:14). What God demands from believers is mindfulness, sincerity, and thanks for every benefit, whether it is corporeal delight or egoistic desire.[14] Sex is included with food, wealth, and power as among our desires, which might be good or bad depending on the intent, intensity, and ethical comportment of the desiring, more than on the specific object or experience desired. The Qur'an warns everyone about sexual lust, regardless of sexual orientation or marital status. Even heterosexual sex with one's legal spouse can be lustful, as implied by the above-quoted verse, if it leads to greed, selfishness, or abuse.

Does the Qur'an contain indications about sexual orientation? Its language specifically addresses heterosexual persons. This is no surprise, since

they constitute the vast majority in any society, including the Prophet Muhammad's immediate environment in Arabia. In one sense, heterosexual relationships are most important for society at large, especially a small one under threat, as was the early Muslim community, since procreation, child-rearing, and family lineage are consequences of heterosexual relationships. For this reason, the Qur'an directly addressed adultery along with legitimacy and inheritance. In contrast, the Qur'an does not clearly and unambiguously address homosexuals in the Muslim community, as there is no term in the Qur'an for "homosexual." This is true despite the fact that many classical Muslim jurists identify the Qur'anic narrative of Lot's struggle with his tribe (*qawm Lut*) as addressing homosexual sex. The Prophet Lot's tribe means the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, as described in the Torah. All Muslim interpreters condemn how the men of Lot's tribe rejected Lot's authority over them by trying to deprive him of the right to extend hospitality and protection to strangers, to the extent of demanding to use the male strangers in a coercive same-sex act. However, some classical interpreters who were jurists "read into" the scriptural text the conclusion that Lot was sent primarily to forbid anal sex between men, which was the principle act of Lot's tribe which constituted their infidelity; there is no opportunity here to give details of their interpretive logic, which I have written about elsewhere.[15] The classical interpreters always discussed sex acts (with almost exclusive attention to anal sex between man and man, sometimes extended to anal sex between man and woman). However, they never discussed sexual orientation as an integral aspect of personality.

If they had, they would not have read the narrative of Lot and his tribe as addressing homosexual acts in general, but rather as addressing male rape of men in particular. Their acts would appear analogous to soldiers using rape as a weapon, as happened in the Balkan wars against men and also women, or analogous to interrogators using sexual acts as tools of domination, as happened in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and elsewhere. Read with a psychological theory of sexual orientation, it appears that the men of Lot's tribe were actually heterosexual men attempting to aggressively assert their power over other vulnerable men. These "men" were the angels who appeared in their city as strangers and wayfarers, to whom Lot offered hospitality and protection in an assertion of his Prophetic authority. The mob attempted to rape the men motivated by rejecting the Prophetic authority of Lot and asserting their own egoistic status and power rather than by sexual desire and bodily pleasure.

Following this line of interpretation actually makes more sense of the many verses that comprise the story of Lot than does the classical interpretation. The verses should be read in context, as inter-referential, in order to interpret the meaning of any particular word or phrase. "And Lot when he said to his people, 'Do you commit the indecency that nobody in the wide world has done before? You do men in lust (*shahwa*) besides women, indeed you are a

people who transgress!' His people answered him with nothing but, 'Drive them out of your town, for they are people who make themselves to be purer!' So we delivered him and his followers, except for his wife—she was one of the goners" (Qur'an 7:80–83. The other versus that tell Lot's story are Qur'an 6:86; 11:77–81; 15:61–72; 21:71–75, 26:161–174; 27:54–57; 37:133–134). If the indecency were sex acts by men with men, then why was Lot's wife also destroyed by God's punishment? Clearly, she was involved in "the indecency," the network of idolatry and exploitation that characterized the city's population, including its women and children who were not involved in the sex acts. The fact that the attacking men had wives and children warns us that their crime, as they *do men in lust besides women,* was not homosexuality or even sex acts *per se,* but rather infidelity and rejection of their Prophet. This is what they have in common with the other destroyed peoples, who are always mentioned before and after them: the people of Noah, Salih, Hud, and Shu'ayb who found innovative ways to drive their Prophets from their midst and undermine their authority. In fact, the chronologically earliest revelation that mentions Lot simply tells us that "the people of Lot treated the warning as a lie...they accosted his guests but we blinded them" (Qur'an 54:33–37), with no mention of sex acts.

In another verse, Lot challenges his attackers: "Do you do males from the wide world and leave what mates God has created for you? Indeed you are people exceeding in aggression!" (Qur'an 26:165–166). Here Lot specifies that these men already have mates (*azwaj*), wives whom God has created for them, and yet they aggressively exceed the bounds of propriety by demanding Lot's guests in disregard for the rights that their spouses have other them. The issue here is the men's disregarding their spouses to attack strangers. But could not one argue that the gender of their victims is actually the problem, while the men's leaving their spouses is just a necessary condition? Another verse addresses the question of gender directly, as Lot confronts his assailants: "His tribe came to him rushing at him and before this they had been practicing bad deeds. Lot said, 'O my people, these are my daughters—they are purer for you so be mindful of God and do not humiliate me over my guests!" (Qur'an 11:78). Some readers might rush to judge that Lot is saying women are purer for the men who are rushing at him, meaning that women are more suitable for sex and are legal as spouses for men. However, to read this verse as an assertion that heterosexual desire is normative takes it totally out of context.

Would anyone believe that a Prophet would offer his daughters to assailants intent on rape, as if their raping women would make the act legitimate and "pure"? Rather, Lot makes a sarcastic comparison to show his assailants how wrong it is to rape guests over whom he has extended protective hospitality. Both he and his tribe know that it is far from pure to take his daughters, whose dignity he protects; Lot argues that assaulting his guests is even worse in his sight than fornicating with his daughters! Far from giving

them license to rape his women, he is expressing to them, with sarcasm born of despair, that vulnerable strangers are as valuable to him as his own children. On the surface, he may appear to talk about the correct gender for men's sexual orientation, while in reality he argues that both men and women deserve protection from rape and humiliation, as a consequence of the ethic of care which fuels his Prophetic mission. The comparison by gender is only to drive home to his audience that strangers of either gender deserve the same protection one gives to daughters. This ethical message comes through clearly in another verse's narration of these events: "Lot said, 'Surely these are my guests, so do not dishonor me—stay mindful of God and do not humiliate me.' They said, 'Have we not forbidden you [granting others protection] from the wide world?' Lot said, 'These are my daughters, if you are intent on doing it'" (Qur'an 15:68–71).

In conclusion, one can argue that the story of Lot is not about homosexuality at all. Rather, Lot criticizes the practice of sex-as-weapon—using sex acts in coercion, as with rape. This is a critique of male sexuality driven by aggression and the urge to subjugate others under their power by force, not male homosexuality in particular. It is incidental to the story that Lot's guests, who are the targets, are men. We can imagine the same story with guests who are women, if the Islamic imagination would allow angels to appear as women. Jurists who have interpreted the story to be about homosexual acts have missed the point. This confirms a persistent pattern in Islamic law, that verses in the Qur'an which critique and limit patriarchy are systematically ignored or distorted to allow men's exertion of power: they allowed polygamy when the Qur'an warns against it, legalized concubines when the Qur'an urges believers to free slaves, and enforced seclusion upon women alone when the Qur'an enjoins both men and women with upholding modesty and fidelity.

Of course, homosexuality does not just involve men whom we call "gay" but also women whom we call "lesbian." Lesbian women face a dual challenge, first as women in Muslim communities and second as women who are sexually attracted to other women. For many lesbian Muslims, the first challenge is the most difficult, since before one can even discuss sexual orientation, one must address whether women are treated as rational and fully human beings, as legally autonomous agents, as morally equal to men, and as subjects with sexual drives that deserve satisfaction beyond their role in procreation. Muslim jurists and interpreters in the classical period produced some amazingly female-affirmative decisions. They acknowledged that women enjoy sex and are entitled to satisfaction from their partner, affirming the existence and potency of female orgasm and ejaculate. They emphasized equal participation of male and female liquids in conception, imagining the donors of egg and sperm to be equal and autonomous agents who come together to draw up a contract of mutual obligation, in radical contrast to earlier Hellenic, Jewish, and Christian theories of sex and fertility in which

only the man and his sperm were active agents.[16] Most jurists not only asserted the legality of nonreproductive sexual intercourse but also affirmed its positive role in cultivating pleasure and generating tenderness between partners—they even lauded foreplay, caressing and sexual activity for pleasure (not restricted to procreative intent) as following the *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammad).

Despite this elite discourse that gives a positive role to women's sexuality and sexual pleasure, actual practice did not often live up to its ideals. Local communities and individual families often stressed the "uncleanliness" of women's sexual organs due to the issue of menstruation and often spun this into a theory of women's inherent moral brokenness. Though Muslims generally accept that women feel and desire sexual satisfaction, patriarchal men often exaggerated this into an uncontrollable force that overwhelms women and corrupts their rational faculties, justifying male control over their movement and social interactions. Too often, discussion of female sexuality was reduced to urging women to satisfy the male prerogative of penetration and preventing any social, spiritual, or intellectual activity of women that might threaten this prerogative. In general, Muslim jurists did not even address sexual acts between two women, because they defined sexual intercourse as penile penetration. They hardly addressed the obvious question of whether penetration, whether with a male penis or anything else, is the epitome and extent of female sexual satisfaction.

The story of Lot does not address sexual acts between women in any way. There are no other verses in the Qur'an clearly addressing lesbians or same-sex acts between women, though some interpreters have searched for one in Qur'an 4:15: "As for those of your women who perpetrate immorality (*al-fahisha*), have four from among yourselves bear witness against them. If they do witness, then confine them [the women] to their rooms until death causes them to perish or until God makes for them a way [of release]." A tenth-century Mu'tazili interpreter, Isfahani, seems to be the first to argue that this verse concerns "immorality" identified as same-sex acts between women (*sihaq*), a suggestion repeated by later interpreters like Zamakhshari and Baydawi in medieval times and Rashid Rida in modern times.[17] This was apparently due to the insistence on four eye witnesses, which is the same requirement for punishing heterosexual acts of fornication; however, the punishment required here is not similar at all to that for fornication (lashing) or adultery (stoning). Why should the immorality discussed in the verse be assumed to be sexual, especially when the grammatical plural "your women" clearly refers to a group of three or more? The immorality it refers to is ambiguous, as the term *fahisha* could refer to a wide range of immoral deeds that are not sexual at all.[18] In fact, the context of these verses (the many preceding it and following it) is about the inheritance of wealth and its just distribution, not about sex or sexual orientation. Fraud in division of inheritance wealth, which could be perpetrated by a group of women, is probably

what the Qur'an warns against and punishes. The assertion that this verse condemns lesbianism and specifies punishment for homosexual acts is quite flimsy. Because of this, some Shiite scholars assert that "the Companions of Rass," mentioned obliquely twice in the Qur'an, were a people destroyed because of widespread lesbianism, though there is not a word in the Qur'an to substantiate such a position.[19]

Conventional interpretations often bypass ethical teachings on distributing wealth to prevent hoarding, misallocation of funds, and exploitation of the vulnerable by creating sexual diversions. Although Qur'anic verse 4:3 does say to men, "marry those of the women that appear good for you—two, three or four," it says this in the context of protecting orphans and warning the men who act as their guardians not to consume unjustly the wealth entrusted to them as the orphans' inheritance. The whole verse reads, "Give to the orphans their wealth without exchanging what is good for what is spoiled. Do not consume their wealth as part of your own wealth, for that is a profound outrage. If you fear that you cannot deal justly with the orphans, then marry those of the women that are good for you—two, three or four. But if you fear that you cannot act justly, then just one..." The ethical context is clearly one of treating orphans justly and managing their wealth without fraud, and the license to marry the women among them (as a way of insuring them logistical and financial support) is given as a last resort if one cannot live up to the expectation of financial care. It was not meant to be taken out of context to justify plural marriages as a social norm for the wealthy elite, though the male jurists did just this. Similarly, the verses allegedly forbidding lesbian sex actually address financial honesty and fraud, which male jurists and interpreters either misrecognized or obscured.

SHARI'A BEYOND THE QUR'AN

Instances like this abound in classical interpretations of the Qur'an and persist in conventional modern interpretations based upon the classical heritage, due to patriarchal assumptions that are "read into the text" at the most basic level. Such assumptions are largely unconscious, being part of the cultural worldview of the male interpreters, a worldview consistent with pre-Islamic practices and shared by other religious traditions in the Middle East. Islamic liberation theology (by women, homosexuals and other marginalized groups) seeks to critically specify these instances of patriarchal presumption. They endeavor to interpret the Qur'an in such a way as to free its ethical message from the limitations of former interpretation and implementation in the Shari'a.

Muslim jurists built Islamic law, taking it upon themselves to judge acts without investigating the intentions behind them. They formulated norms and punishments to regulate sexual behavior with exclusive focus upon

physical acts and anatomical organs. In general, they forbade homosexual acts between men, just as they forbade heterosexual penetrative sex with a partner without the legal relationship of a contract of marriage, ownership through slavery, or oral contract of temporary union (*mutʿa* as allowed by Shiite jurists though rejected by Sunnis). When it comes to homosexual acts, the laws in the Islamic jurisprudential tradition are not actually based upon the Qur'an, as will be discussed below. Far from explicitly forbidding homosexuality, the Qur'an arguably contains inferences to the existence of homosexual persons in the Muslim community. Explicating these hints requires interpretation, but so does ignoring them! Both hints occur in the Qur'anic discussion of gender segregation. Both are exceptions to a general rule that men and women should not freely mix if they are not related by blood, marriage, or a contract that can regulate their affairs.

The Qur'an gives a long and detailed list of the kinds of men with whom women can behave more freely: after listing relatives, it says "their womenfolk, their slaves, or their followers among the men who have no wiles with women or children who do not recognize the sexual nakedness of women" (Qur'an 24:31). The "followers among the men who have no wiles with women," preceded by "womenfolk" and followed by "children who do not recognize the sexual nakedness of women" suggests that these men (like heterosexual women or preadolescent children) have no sexual desire for women and are therefore exempt from the general rule of separation. Classical interpreters thought this verse applied to elderly men or impotent men, whom they assumed were exempt by fiat or age or anatomy. However, with the emergence of a modern social category of "gay men," we should extend the interpretation to include them. If we do, we conclude that the Qur'an mentions gay men in an indirect but potent way, recognizing the unique characteristic that sets them apart from other adult men—their not sexually desiring women and therefore not being a threatening presence in their intimate company—with no condemnation.

In a similar way, there is a verse that hints at the existence of lesbian women in the Muslim community. The Qur'an addresses men on issues of gender separation and the preservation of domestic privacy for women: "Yet if your children have reached sexual maturity, then require them to ask permission before entering, like those mentioned before, for in this way God clarifies for you God's signs, and God is a knowing One, One most wise. Of the women, those not reproducing who do not wish for intercourse, it is no harm for them to lay aside their clothing as long as they do not overtly display their beauty [in the company of men]" (Qur'an 24:60). The key term is "those not reproducing" (*al-qawaʿid*). It describes fertility, meaning withdrawn from reproductive activity, like a field left to rest and not sown with seed or a date palm not pollinated. The Qur'an clarifies this term, saying that such women do not wish for sexual intercourse, which is the same word in Arabic for marriage (*nikah*). Classical interpreters described such women as elderly,

beyond the capacity to become pregnant. However, we know from sexological research that postmenopausal women are still sexually active and often desire intercourse. Therefore, the verse seems to invite a deeper interpretation. The reason such women are not reproducing is because they do not desire sexual intercourse with men, due to their sexual orientation rather than merely their supposed lack of fertility or libido.

Such a sexuality-sensitive interpretation accords with both reason and the literal meaning of the scriptural text, and therefore according to classical principles of Qur'anic interpretation or *tafsir*.[20] It deserves recognition as one of several possible meanings, all equally valid. From this perspective, the Qur'anic verses conventionally held to condemn homosexual acts do not actually address homosexuality, and other verses conventionally held to address the nonsexual elderly actually refer to the presence of homosexual members of the Islamic community in a non-condemning way. Without a concept of homosexuality, a psychological theory of sexual orientation, one misses these inferences. They have gone unnoticed by classical Muslim interpreters and are deliberately ignored by modern interpreters who are Neo-Traditionalists and assert unsophisticated notions of "human nature."

Such a theory of homosexuality is available to us today, in ways that were not articulated in the past, either in the West or in Islamic societies. We need to examine the origin of the term homosexuality itself. It was coined first by doctors to diagnose an "illness" in the late nineteenth century and was quickly used by homosexual advocates to argue for decriminalization of particular sex acts and social justice for marginalized minorities. The invention of the term "homosexuality" occurred amid changes in social organization and economic life associated with capitalism and industrialization, which expanded the potential for individualism, buttressed by a liberal ideal of human rights. It is nestled within a series of revolutions: a bourgeois revolution against aristocracy in the late eighteenth century, a workers' revolt against unfettered oligarchy in the mid-nineteenth century, women's opposition to male superiority in the early twentieth century, a nonwhite uprising against colonial domination in the 1940s, and a youth rebellion against patriotic norms in the 1960s. These overlapping revolutions allowed homosexuals to assert their humanity and rights, first in the early twentieth century in Europe (until snuffed out by fascism) and later in America from 1969. The invention of the term homosexuality helped shift the terms of discussion from the Church's rhetoric of "sodomy" and the police's rhetoric of "buggery" to the psychologist's rhetoric of "sexual orientation."[21]

With cycles of success and failure, legal recognition and protection of homosexuals has taken root in certain areas (especially Scandinavia and the Netherlands, followed by other nations in Continental Europe, Britain, and Canada). Other areas where Catholicism or Evangelical Protestantism remains a force in political life, like the United States and southern Europe, have lagged a bit behind. Similarly, Muslim majority nations in which

secularism is strong (either in the form of anticlericism like in Turkey, or in the form of pluralistic government above multiple religious communities as in Lebanon, India, and Indonesia) are moving slowly toward decriminalizing homosexual acts and allowing homosexual people to build civic organizations for legal protection and human rights. All these cases, Euro-American or Islamic, have two factors in common: economic and social development that foster individual autonomy, and political and cultural development that keep religion separate from government.

These replicate the changes in the social order in Western Europe and North America which were necessary preconditions for the emergence of a concept of homosexuality: economic prosperity, urbanization, and the emergence of the nuclear family so that individuals could assert a greater degree of individuality. They also include political liberalization, so that citizens are granted rights as autonomous agents outside of their family, communal, or religious institution. These social changes are reinforced by greater depth of technical expertise in medical and psychological research that offer a more "secular" definition of human nature outside the purview of traditional authorities, whether these are tribal leaders, patriarchal households, or religious scholars.

This history explains how the term homosexuality first came into use to describe an emerging modern concept that was not available to classical Muslim interpreters. However, it would be wrong to assume that homosexuals did not exist before there was a clinical name for them. Homosexuals have always existed as a minority within every cultural group, even if an abstract term like "homosexuality" was not there to label them. There may have been different social constructions as roles for homosexual people (priest, artist, seer, joker, heretic, criminal to name just a few examples), and such social constructions change over time and vary between communities, yet the essential psychological element, difference based on sexual orientation and expression, was present in every place beneath the variety of names and concepts. It is essential to bear in mind that what modern researchers mean by "homosexuality" is not at all what classical Muslim scholars meant by "sodomy" (*liwata*). *Liwata* denoted anal penetration as an act and said nothing about the intention, the sexual orientation, or the inner disposition of the person performing the act.

Do contemporary Muslim scholars recognize this difference? How do they react to these social changes and their scientific challenges to religious orthodoxy? We can observe a "Neo-Traditionalist" reaction that is very powerful today, that combines traditional Shari'a rhetoric with more modern secular denunciations without really accepting contemporary scientific research. One such scholar from the Deoband Academy, Maulana Zahir al-Din, wrote a book against homosexuality which he titled *Suicide,* claiming it to be "the first scholarly book on un-natural sexual desire, meaning the act of Lot's people, and the hatefulness and corruption of its proponents, researched in

the light of the Qur'an and Prophetic example and history and medicine.'' The title literally means ''killing one's future progeny'' and reflects the modern patriarchal analysis that homosexuality is predominantly the lack of heterosexual procreation and amounts to killing one's family line, and is therefore ''against the civilizational way of life'' promoted by Islam. However, Zahir al-Din freely mixes sacred and secular arguments, as when he writes that ''It is not permitted in any revealed religion, that is not in Islam and not in any other religion, that a person can fulfill sexual desires with a person of his own sex, meaning a man with another man or a woman with another woman.... It is the strangest, most bizarre and most anxiety-provoking thing in this world for a man to choose to fulfill his sexual desire with another man, and we should understand the extremes of this as a kind of insanity. This is because it is an act against human nature (*khilaf-i fitrat fi'l*) that is not just about sexual appetite but also about satanic delusion.''[22] Such Neo-Traditionalist scholars reify Shari'a norms and adopt *ad hoc* notions of ''nature'' from the nineteenth century that support patriarchal presumptions, while ignoring the contemporary social and scientific research that places them in question.[23]

Such reactions are insufficient and disappointing. Scientific advances challenge Muslims to rethink their tradition and open up new ways of asserting the relevance of the Qur'an to contemporary realities. To address these opportunities, religious scholars (*ulama*) would have to be open to sharing authority with ''secular'' scholars and scientists. If they were confident and flexible with an inner strength, they could do this; but alas, they are stiff and fragile with a sense of embattled defensiveness that closes their minds and rusts their hearts. This attitude does not live up to the Islamic tradition of the past, which never accepted a cleavage between scientific discovery and scriptural revelation, as both were rooted in the sincere application of God's gift of reason. Contemporary Neo-Traditionalists are more concerned to ''defend the Shari'a'' than to sincerely confront the challenge of the Qur'an, and this is the cause of their rigidity. To be very honest, I find this posture one of idolatry, for they have raised the Shari'a, a product of human hands and minds, to the level of the Qur'an which is God's speech to humankind. The question for critical believers is whether the rulings enshrined in the Shari'a represent accurate conclusions from the Qur'an and justice-embodying extensions of the Prophet's example, or rather represent the all-too-human prejudices of patriarchal jurists in generations after the Prophet passed away.

The Shari'a punishments for homosexual acts, both between men and between women, are well known and much debated. However, it is seldom acknowledged that the Shari'a punishments are not derived from the Qur'an, no matter what interpretation one accepts of Lot and his tribe. Even before hadith reports attributed to the Prophet were collated and collected into books, the punishment for men having sex with other men had already been

decided, not by the Prophet himself but by some of his followers. The issue of deciding which hadith reports are accurate and authentic is very difficult, and then deciding whether they have legal force is quite complex; reviewing these reports for authenticity is the key to reforming the Shari'a from within. Despite the fact that this was an invaluable activity by Islamic scholars in the past and is essential to the livelihood of the Shari'a as a system, it is now considered taboo, and anyone who brings up the subject can expect swift denunciation by guardians of the status quo.

There are many hadith in circulation about punishing men for homosexual acts and several about punishing women, and a few about cursing those who transgress gender norms. As a case study, let us focus here on the punishment for a man's having sex with another man, as this is the obsession of jurists and set the denunciatory tone for the modern treatment of gays, lesbians, and transgendered persons. Whether hadith reports on this subject are authentic or not needs to be determined by focused research using traditional *isnad* criticism and *matn* criticism. *Isnad* is the chain of authorities who narrated the report, while *matn* is textual content of the report itself. Hadith science, in theory, allowed reports to be rejected if their content contradicted reason, medical reality or scientific observation.[24] Sadly, most Neo-Traditionalists are loath to actually use these traditional tools, as the results of sincere research will most likely go against their vested interests.

Whether judged authentic or not, it is clear that these reports do not represent the Prophet Muhammad's actual decision of a concrete case (in contrast to the hadith reports about heterosexual adultery cases). They reinforce decisions that were made by the early Islamic community, based upon their own presumptions. The earliest known case occurred during the vice-regency of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, after the Prophet's death. Khalid ibn Walid wrote him a letter asking for a decision on what to do with a man found having sex with another man as if he were having sex with a woman. Abu Bakr summoned important Companions of the Prophet to make a decision. Among them was 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, who is reported to have said, "This is a sin which no community was known to have done except one community and God did to them what you well know, so I think we should burn him with fire." Based on this opinion, Abu Bakr ordered that the man be burned.[25]

Close attention to this narrative (*khabar*) reveals many key points. First, the vice-regent called for counsel because there was no precedent in the Prophet Muhammad's own actions. Second, the council included some of the Prophet's closest followers who would have related the Prophet's own words on this subject, if any had been known. Third, none of the Companions related a teaching of the Prophet on this issue, throwing into grave doubt whether any of the hadith reports later attributed to the Prophet are authentically from him. Fourth, 'Ali made a decision based upon his own reasoning, to burn the man alive in imitation of how God punished

the people of Sodom and Gomorrah by raining down upon them burning stones. Fifth, this decision was based on informal comparison, not on formal judicial reasoning which is the basis for Islamic law. Sixth, we have no other example of such a comparison used to justify punishments for other acts (for instance, God destroyed Noah's people for idolatry in the great flood but Islamic law does not punish idolaters with drowning, and God destroyed Salih's people for killing His sacred camel in a volcanic eruption but Islamic law does not punish wrongful slaughter of animals with asphyxiation). Seventh, such informal comparison is not allowed to justify legal decisions in the Shari'a. These points highlight the fact that 'Ali and the early Companions were doing what they thought was right but were not acting according to direct guidance from the Prophet or upon an explicit command of the Qur'an. No matter how much we respect these early leaders of the Muslim community, we must admit that they acted upon their opinion and cultural presumptions—therefore their actions are open to review and reassessment.

After reviewing this report (*khabar*), we can better understand why hadith reports were later circulated that justified capital punishment in the name of the Prophet rather than 'Ali and companions. This report offers a rather flimsy justification for taking the life of a believer, even if it is accepted that he sinned in his act. Some people in Medina continued to burn men found having sex with other men, but others found it to be out-of-line with the emerging practice of Islamic law, which tried to decide if homosexual acts were the same as heterosexual acts without a contract (*zina*). If so, the punishment would be lashing, rather than burning. The naïve reader might ask what is the difference if the result is death? The difference is tremendous. The punishment for heterosexual intercourse without a contract between the partners (*zina*) is clearly stipulated in the Qur'an and was carried out by the Prophet. If the punishment for homosexual sex were, by formal analogy, declared to be like adultery, then the punishment could be argued to be based on the Qur'an, extending the punishment for one crime to that of an analogous crime. Also at issue is whether homosexual intercourse is a crime against God (*hadd*) as is heterosexual adultery (*zina*).[26] There are some reports that 'Ali himself ordered men who had sex with men to be stoned; either he changed his mind to seal the analogy with *zina* as adultery or he was reported to have done so to support the jurists who argued by this analogy.

The opinion of the early jurist, Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 CE), shows a transitional state which favors stoning but not through analogy with *zina*. His book, *al-Muwatta,* one of the earliest collections of hadith reports, does not substantiate his ruling on male homosexual intercourse with a hadith report because, one suspects, there were none in circulation at that time. Rather he supported the stoning rule solely on the fact that the people of Medina did this: "He is to be stoned whether he is married or unmarried."[27] This second phrase, "married or unmarried," reveals that Malik's ruling is still based on a unique punishment and not on an analogy with *zina,* for

which punishment is stoning if one is already married but is a lesser lashing if unmarried. It was not until the time of Shafi'i (d. 820 CE) that jurists' decisions had to be based upon the Prophet's Sunna as defined solely by hadith reports, rather than by community practice as in the opinion of Malik or by reliance on reasoned deduction as in the opinions of Abu Hanifa (d. 767 CE). From this time, hadith reports had a great significance whereas before they were often held in suspicion. Subsequently, many hadith reports that circulated orally were written down for use in the law, and reports that may have originated with Companions and Followers were claimed to actually be from the Prophet. With this change in legal thinking, there developed intense pressure to give even weak reports adequate chains of transmission, and to justify prior decisions that may have come from followers of the Prophet as having come directly from him. Accordingly, we find Shafi'i and Hanbali jurists with hadith reports, allegedly from the Prophet's lips, which earlier jurists and even Abu Bakr give no evidence of having known. Not surprisingly, these alleged reports substantiate the ruling that homosexual intercourse is analogous to heterosexual intercourse outside of a contractual relationship (*zina*). In his collection of hadith reports, the *Musnad,* Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 CE) includes reports specifying death by stoning, with some variation in the wording, reports that stricter hadith scholars, like Bukhari (d. 870 CE) and Muslim (d. 875 CE), did not include in theirs. The flood-gates were thus opened for all sorts of reports alleged to be from the Prophet; some are quite far-fetched and medieval scholars have thrown them out as falsifications, like the reports that say homosexual men will be raised on Judgment Day as pigs and apes, or that when a man mounts another man the earth beseeches God to allow it to convulse and swallow them up to conceal their act, or that no young man is more shameless than one who allows himself to be entered from behind.[28] Despite being debunked by medieval scholars, Neo-Traditionalists still use these alleged hadith reports against anyone who dares to discuss homosexuality.

My own research has been accused of being ''glib'' and ''unscholarly'' for raising the issue of the authenticity of these reports.[29] In reality, for Neo-Traditionalists the pertinent issue is not which reports are authentic and which are not, but whose voice is authoritative in having the right to speak about them. It is my suggestion (and it remains a hypothesis until more research is done on Hadith by all voices in the current debate) that such reports do not represent authentic teachings of the Prophet. Rather, they represent homophobic prejudice common to patriarchal cultures, whether Arab, Hellenic, Jewish, or Byzantine. Like misogynist values, they were inscribed in the Shari'a from an early time, even though they were not part of the Prophet Muhammad's example.[30] Cultural prejudices could have been reinforced by a concept of sacred history adopted from Jewish culture, notions of imperial law adopted from Byzantine sources, and medical theories adopted from Greek sources, all of which saw women in general and

homosexual men, as incomplete beings compared to the ideal of the patriarchal empowered man. It would be a fascinating but very long journey to trace in detail all of these cultural streams that flowed into the sea of Islamic society during the formative period of its law, theology, and cultural worldview. My contention is that much of Islamic theology and law is based upon a view of human nature that is cultural and not scriptural, and is therefore contingent and not eternal; as our understanding of what human nature is grows and develops, Islamic theology and law deserves to be held up to scrutiny in the light of justice, social benefit, and reasoned observation, since the Qur'an addresses itself to the human being and not to the Arab male, or to the medieval Persian sultan, or to the Pakistani grandmother. In fact, it is not just a right but also a duty for sincere Muslims to scrutinize their inherited traditions in order to live up to the Qur'anic challenge. Inevitably, believers will disagree over the method and intensity of this scrutiny, but as long as this disagreement is tempered by mutual respect, it is part of the magnificent diversity of Islam and in accord with the Prophet's teaching that "difference of opinion in my community is a mercy."

PAIRS AND PARTNERS

There were disagreements between different schools of law (*madhhab*) over whether homosexual penetrative sex was equivalent to heterosexual adultery (*zina*), for which the punishment was lashing (for an unmarried participant) or stoning to death (for a participant married already to someone else). For instance, Hanafi jurists argued that homosexual sex was not the same as *zina,* since the Qur'an specifies that *zina* is sex between a man and a woman; instead they argued that punishment for homosexual penetration was not stipulated by the Qur'an and was up to the discretion of judges (*ta'zir*) and could change depending on social conventions. Behind these disagreements were differences in philosophy: were only penetrative behaviors considered "sex acts"? Were homosexual acts a sin against God or merely against human convention? Were they forbidden because of the same-sex nature of the couple or because the couple did not have a contract to legalize their union?

This is no place to enter these fascinating and complex legal discussions, which I have written about earlier. Let me make just a few observations. Although classical Islamic law generally forbids same-sex acts, there was not juridical consensus (*ijma'*) as to why, under what conditions and with what punishment. We can safely assert that the subject should still be discussed and, in the light of new evidence and under unprecedented social conditions, be open to revision through *ijtihad*. Classical Islamic law forbids same-sex actions but did not address same-sex relationships, allowing us to ask whether, if there could be legal contracts of marriage or civic union between

same-sex partners, the sex acts would still be illegal or immoral.[31] Jurists ruled on same-sex acts on the basis of hadith reports not the Qur'an, for verses about the Prophet Lot, even if they are interpreted as being about homosexuality, do not have legal specificity as required to formulate rulings in the Shari'a. These hadith reports are of questionable authenticity, as some have broken chains of transmission and most of them have single-transmission chains that, in Islamic legal theory, can lead to speculative opinion but not to obligating certainty. Hanafi jurists, for instance, refused to rely on single-transmission hadith reports, especially if the decision could lead to corporal punishment as it could in the issue of penetrative homosexual sex acts. Though Hanafis held that same-sex intercourse is immoral, they asserted that it was not a *hadd* crime, insisting that there should be no capital punishment but rather that government authorities could punish it as they see fit.[32] Implicit in their position is that the government's assessment could change as social conditions change, making their position a promising place to begin reform.

I am afraid that contemporary jurists do not have the confidence to open these crucial questions for reassessment, but perhaps they will surprise us! Their voices are often superceded and drowned out by demagogues and ideologues, who shout representations of the Shari'a without being educated about the complexities of jurisprudence. Examples of this rhetoric are legion in pamphlets and Internet *fatwa*s, like some of those on "IslamOnline."

The Qur'an talks about sexual pairing and partnerships in ways that are much deeper than Islamic law and theology, and this should be the starting place for a reconsideration of sexuality and homosexuality among Muslims. "Glory be to the One who creates the mates, all of them, in what grows upon the earth and from themselves and from what you do not even know!" (Qur'an 36:35–36). The Qur'an invokes pairs and partners in ways too complex to be reduced to a heterosexual pair of man and woman (or even a hetero-plurality of man and women). Certainly, Adam and Eve are termed "a pair" who mate at God's direction to provide each other with rest and tranquility. In the Qur'an, all life is created in pairs, "male and female," to insure reproduction and growth, among animals and fruits and plants. However, the Qur'an does not limit the mysterious principle of growth to gendered pairs but extends it to all pairs. To say "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" would be a gross reduction of the Qur'an's teaching about mating in pairs!

In recognition of this, classical interpreters of the Qur'an have considered the soul in intimate harmony with the body it animates to be "a pair of mates." Sufi thinkers have reflected very deeply about the nature of the soul and how God interacts with the human being, and Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE), for example, has explained how the "mating" of masculine and feminine

forces in the cosmos and in the human personality drives the perpetual creation and re-creation of the world. His exposition reinforces the ideal that God creates humanity and the universe out of love, and shows how our own innate sexuality leads us through erotic experiences that can be refined into spiritual reflection, even if it does reify conventional notions of male and female.[33] We can follow Ibn ʻArabi's spiritual guidance to explain how all the levels of the human personality described above (*fitra, tabiʻa, shakila,* and *sura*) are formed by a union of forces that come together as mates. By picturing these in Figure 7.1, we can understand how sexuality is woven deeply into our nature, regulating the union of self-and-other which shapes us at each level. Figure 7.1 may be abstract, but it tries to picture the complexity of our human nature and how its levels are interwoven by sexuality. I developed this figure in light of the Qur'an and commentaries upon it in Islamic ethics developed by Sufis, and integrated into it insights by Western psychologists.[34]

One should read Figure 7.1 from top to bottom to understand the different dimensions of the human personality. Each dimension appears as two halves of a sphere, representing self and other which come together into a whole. The intimate interaction between self and other at each level is conditioned by the sphere above. For clarity, each sphere is represented as distinct, emerging one from another in a series: starting with the human spirit's confrontation with God as the "primal other" at the level of *fitra,* extending from that into the soul's integration with the body as the "material other" at the level of *tabiʻa,* progressing to the psyche's experience of family and environment as the "social other" at the level of *shakila,* and leading to the more everyday dimension of the ego's negotiation with particular relationships, like with a sexual partner or spouse as the "community other" at the level of *sura* at the bottom of Figure 7.1.

While this depiction suggests a hierarchy, in reality all dimensions are in constant interaction. The top-to-bottom depiction of different levels suggests growth. *Fitra* arises from our engagement with God at a time extending from before creation (the day of the primordial covenant) until beyond eternity (the day of reckoning and its consequences), as stated in Qur'an 7:172. *Tabiʻa* takes form from our soul's integration with the material body, beginning with conception and progressing through animation, birth and rearing. *Shakila* develops from our experience with our environment, physical, linguistic, social, and emotional, especially in childhood but continuing throughout maturation, as our inward disposition takes shape from biological, material and genetic forces, influenced by our parents' and their social world. *Sura* is the outward appearance of these invisible forces and developmental processes, and we come into its fullness through adolescence and young adulthood; then we reach sexual maturity, assert some measure of independence from parental control, and develop a personal sense of

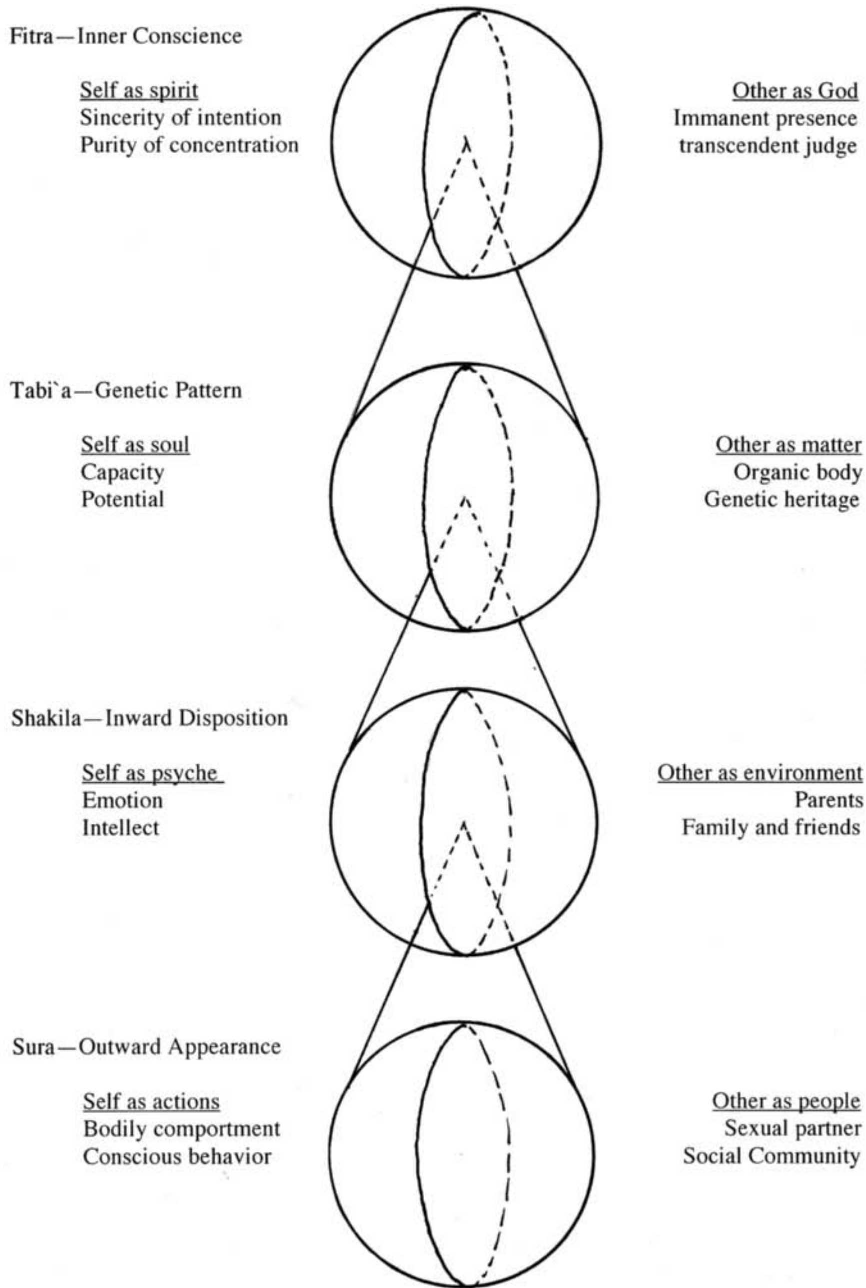

Figure 7.1 Depiction of Four Layers of Human Personality

responsibility for our actions. This is why Islamic law considers youngsters legally responsible for their acts only after puberty.

SEXUAL ETHICS

Sura describes our outward manifestation, not just in looks but also in deeds. Through our outward manifestation, we interact with others in rituals of worship, contracts of business, social engagements of all kinds, and sexual intercourse with a partner. All these acts are outwardly manifested deeds but are deeply rooted in the multiple layers of our personalities, involving what is observable (like the deed itself), what is sbtle (like the emotion and intention that motivates any deed), what is microscopic (like the genetic pattern that allows us to act) and what is invisible to observation (like the sincerity behind the deed and its spiritual worth). Our outward manifestation, in *sura* and in acts, is not separable from other layers of our personality. Any religious discourse that judges matters of sex and sexuality without considering these complexities commits injustice (*zulm*) in the name of moral order.

Many of my fellow Muslims will take alarmed exception to the statement above. They might see it as leading to an erasure of moral guidance right in the heart of the family, where norms of gender and limits on sexual expression are learned and enforced. However, I do not make the statement in order for it to be taken to an extreme of moral nihilism. Rather, it should be seen as a moderate plea for cautious moral relativism, rational scrutiny, and ethical self-restraint. It should be placed in the context of developing a "progressive Islam" that embraces contemporary scientific and sociological facts, while questioning the self-righteousness of much of what passes for Islamic "orthodoxy" today. I am not calling for moral absolutes to be abandoned, but for their definition to be adjusted to the lived realities of diverse and pluralistic communities and for their application in discrete cases to be tempered by ethical sensitivity. A call for this change is well within the boundaries of the Islamic tradition, as upheld by the best of Islamic law.

One can see this quality at work in the treatment of theft. Although the Qur'an is very clear that the punishment for theft is severing the hand of the thief, Muslim jurists consistently applied rational scrutiny, sociological context, and ethical restraint in passing judgments about theft, in direct proportion to the severity of punishment. This means that "theft" is defined by the situation of the act, rather than by moralistic indignation or populist legislation about what constitutes theft.[35] For instance, a thief who steals because her family is impoverished would not be punished as severely as if she had stolen out of greed. Judges were more interested in promoting social welfare and preserving human reason than in reifying moral absolutism.

It is this ethical spirit that used to animate Islamic law that we Muslims seem to have lost in contemporary times. Assessing the ambiguity of

individual cases and granting leeway to diverse situations was not seen as an affront to the Shari'a, but was its very purpose as an ethical framework rather than a code of rules.[36] Jurists never "defended the Shari'a" by meting out violence upon individuals, especially those who were vulnerable or whose social standing was ambiguous. How different this classical spirit of Islamic law is from its contemporary analogues! The revolutionary regime in Iran, the cultic Salafis of the Taliban, and the Wahhabi monarchy in Arabia pride themselves in meting out capital punishment for homosexuals, as if the blood of scapegoats washed away their many highly immoral policies. The vulnerability of homosexuals to the political expediency of immoral regimes is evident even in states where Islamic law is not applied as national law, as in recent persecutions of gay men in Egypt as the government of Hosni Mubarak tries to deflect attention away from corruption and economic reforms that hurt the poor while trying to defuse fundamentalists' critiques of their legitimacy. Accusations of homosexuality are also common ways for the powerful to eliminate political opposition, as with the Malaysian politician, Anwar Ibrahim. Such examples of power abuse should spark the ire of moderately conscientious and progressively engaged Muslims. It should fuel their resolve to reform how homosexuals are treated within Muslim communities, both at home and in the wider *Umma*. A moratorium on capital punishment within the Shari'a, as advocated by Tariq Ramadan, is a good first step; it must be reinforced by an ethical consensus that Muslims will not kill or injure other Muslims, whether due to sectarian politics, dogmatic chauvinism (*takfir*), or moral policing.[37] This must, of course, be coupled with a renewal of an ethic of care that upholds the dignity of each human being and protects the rights of each, whether Muslim or not, whether male or not, whether straight or not, whether married or not.

So far I have argued that sexuality should not be used to victimize Muslims, whether it is women accused of adultery or lesbians and gays accused of immorality. Such ethical abuses of sexuality should be seen in continuity with rape, sex used as torture or punishment, sexual abuse within the family, or sexual coercion within marriage. Muslim communities need to break the silence of shame around these abuses, for silence only allows the victims' wounds to fester and the perpetrator's injustice to continue. Reexamining attitudes toward sexuality is also acutely necessary for Muslim minority communities living in Western democratic states, where they are legally and moral bound as citizens to uphold the constitution, which often grants rights and protection to women, lesbians and gays, and transgendered persons in ways not found in traditional Shari'a. For Muslim minorities in these conditions there are two choices: either the Shari'a needs deep reform to bring its practices into congruence with constitutional democracy or consensus must develop that the Shari'a is applicable only to explicitly ritual matters (*'ibadat*), leaving civic matters (*mu'amalat*) to be governed by the laws and mores of the nation in which they live. If minority Muslims in

Western states cannot reconcile their sense of religious conscience with their civic obligations under a constitution, they are morally bound to emigrate to a place where they feel a Muslim majority is upholding the Shari'a in the way they think necessary.

What about sexual ethics in a more positive sense? Can Muslim communities accommodate lesbian and gay members who are also Muslims? Can the Shari'a be adapted to a more pluralistic ethic that celebrates sexuality and embraces sexual diversity? If so, what would "Islamic" gay and lesbian life be like? These are not utopian questions but are rather intensely practical, and are actually being worked out, slowly and tentatively, by gay and lesbian Muslim support groups. Fortunately, the Qur'an offers amazing resources for this project, if Muslims gather the courage to engage in *ijtihad*. The Qur'an challenges each person to find a suitable mate or partner. The term for partner, *zawj*, is ambiguously gendered: it is a masculine noun grammatically even when describing female persons. Homosexual pairs could also, within this wide and varied framework, be considered mates as the Qur'anic language is suitably abstract. "One of God's signs is that [God] created for you mates from amongst yourselves that you might find repose in them, and generated between you love and compassion, for surely in this are clear signs for those who ponder!" (Qur'an 30:21). We must keep in mind that this level of abstraction traces the general and universal pattern, while the story of Adam and Eve as the primordial mates is a specific instance of it: "It is God who created you all from a single self and made of it a mate, that one might take repose in the other" (Qur'an 7:189). In this specific case as in many other places, the Qur'an talks of male and female being a pair, but not in a prescriptive way, for the Qur'an also talks of night and day being a pair, or light and dark, or the soul and body. God creates for each person a mate or mates "of it" or of the same pattern and suitable for the two to join together, in love and compassion, to reach a greater emotional and ethical completion. The purpose is for each of us to overcome our self-centered pride and through loving one another to realize that God created us all, all of humanity, *from a single self*.

Sexual intercourse and intimacy is part of this ethical training and spiritual refinement. Islam is challenging in that it does not condemn sexual pleasure in favor of ascetic renunciation and does not limit sexuality to procreation.[38] In this way, Islam is unique among world religions, though Muslim communities have not always lived up to this challenge! However, the Qur'an is clear that sexual pleasure and satisfaction, while good in themselves, should be pursued within ethical limits. Partners should establish between themselves a contract or agreement, through which they acknowledge their legal, financial, and ethical obligations to each other: obligations which include comfort and care, keeping of secrets, upholding the other's public dignity, and safeguarding the other's health, both physical and psychological. Interactions with others outside the purview of a contract should be conducted

within accepted norms of modesty: without invasive staring, manipulative strategies, or abusive cunning. The Qur'an enjoins both men and women to wear modest clothing (though what constitutes modesty is left to social norms), speak respectfully, and lower the gaze. In general, the Qur'an announces the principle of avoiding objectifying others in a sexual way to uphold our common humanity. It permits pleasure bounded by care. It enjoins reciprocity, both of rights and pleasures, within a relationship.

This basis of sexual ethics applies to men as well as to women. In a pluralistic Islamic community, it would apply to homosexual couples as well as to heterosexual ones. The purposes of "finding one's mate" are the same for hetero- and homosexual couples, so the ethical guidelines for establishing relationships should also be the same. Fortunately for Muslims, the marriage contract is not a sacrament as in Christianity but a contract; in form and substance is it quite close to a secular "civil union" that is increasingly being adopted by Western democracies. Heterosexual Muslims living as citizens of Western countries register their marriages as civil unions, even if they have a religious ceremony to mark the occasion. Legally, this is no different than homosexual unions under those governments that allow same-sex marriage or civic union, such as Canada, Britain, many European states, and South Africa. In these places, homosexual Muslims can now form legal unions between same-sex partners, which have equal legal status to their heterosexual neighbors. Would Muslim citizens of such nations recognize the legality and validity of same-sex marriage contracts, even if they found them morally questionable or even repugnant? Increasingly, Muslims living in the West will be have to confront this reality, and in places like the Netherlands the answer Muslims give may determine whether they are seen to be citizens who accept the laws and values upon which the nation rests or outsiders who are a threat. Sadly, on-line *fatwas* document how Neo-Traditionalists fail to live up to this challenge.[39]

JUSTICE AND BEAUTY

Why is it important to grant homosexuals the same right to marry and establish ethical contracts between partners? It is not a matter of pleading for "special rights." It is not merely demanding equal rights, to have the same possibilities and responsibilities as heterosexual couples. It is a matter of justice, of clearing a way for homosexual Muslims to partake, with honesty and dignity, in the Prophet Muhammad's paradigm so that they can cultivate an ethical life along with their heterosexual sisters and brothers in finding a sincere way to return to God. This is because the four levels of personality development outlined above are not just descriptive but rather establish a framework for each person's spiritual development, for one cannot return to God except through one's own distinctive personality. Sufi psychologists

have distilled from the Qur'an four distinct phases of the soul's struggle toward God, and each corresponds to a level of the personality. If the levels of personality mark a descent deep into the world of materiality, embodiment, particularity, and contingency, then the four phases of the soul's return to God mark an ascent (*mi'raj*) through sincere awareness toward greater spiritual refinement and universal love.

The soul while struggling in outward behavior, the level of *sura,* can be called *the soul that commands toward evil.* At this stage, the soul strives to understand right and wrong, beneficial and harmful, conditioned by its particular place and personality resources (Qur'an 12:53). After maturing through that struggle, the soul is refined a little and can identify with greater clarity the sources of its selfish urges and repressed pain; it can struggle with the subtler forces of egoism and family trauma at the level of *shakila,* and can be called *the soul full of blame.* At first, the soul criticizes others for its pain while later, as insight grows, it blames itself (Qur'an 75:2). Resigning itself from blame and gaining greater self-knowledge through exploration, prayer, and meditation, the soul engages its primal limitations at the level of *tabi'a,* confronting its material limitation, its penchant to decay, and its body's ultimate mortality; the soul that comes to peace with this reality can be called *the tranquil soul,* for it is at ease in humble harmony with its limitations (Qur'an 89:27). Finally, through tranquility and inner peace, the soul can gain sustained contact with its original nature at the level of *fitra,* to worship with utter sincerity and act in the world with pure spirituality, acknowledging God directly as its only Lord; such a soul can be called the soul *well-pleased and well-pleasing,* the state of the souls called into paradise (Qur'an 89:28). In Islam, none of these stages of spiritual development are obstructed by sexuality or sexual relationships, although if they are not in balanced harmony, sex and family life can certainly distract one from spiritual aspiration and hard work (Figure 7.2).

Developing a well-tempered personality in the downward arc toward diversification and individualization is a necessary condition before one can aspire to complete the cycle, pursing the upward arc toward spiritual realization. This is because sincerity is the only fuel for the journey, as a great Sufi jurist expressed, saying "Whoever journeys to God through his own nature, his arrival to God is closer to him than his own nature, and whoever journeys to God through abandoning his own nature, his arrival to God is dependent on his distance from his own nature; attaining distance from one's own nature is difficult indeed."[40] In other words, those who know themselves know their Lord. Clearly, if people are in denial of their true natures or are denied the dignity of expressing their true nature, internal and external pressures obstruct them from aspiring to return to God with sincerity. This is true whether people's personalities are under pressure by racism, by sexism, by poverty, or by homophobia. It is a matter of justice to clear away such obstacles,

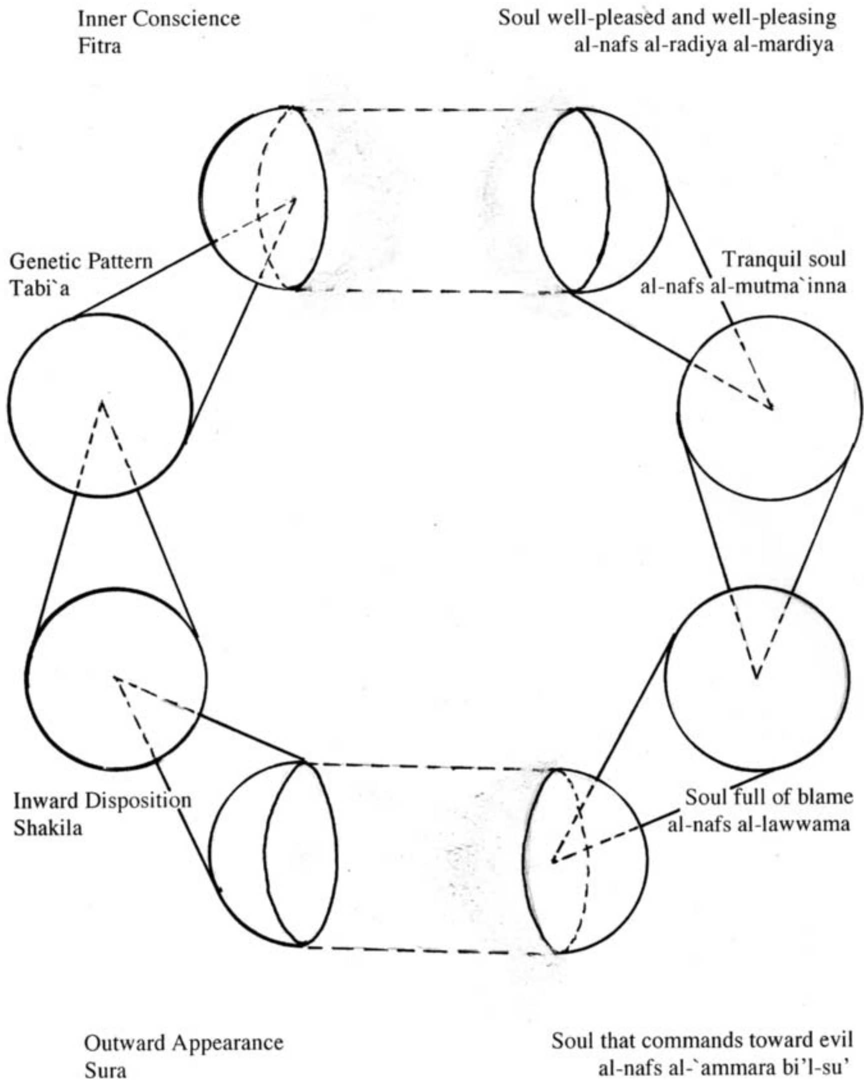

Figure 7.2 Depiction of States of the Soul in Relation to the Layers of Personality

whether they are caused by internalized fear, social stigma, or a moral system based on patriarchal prejudices. It is necessary for homosexual Muslims to achieve a minimum of justice in their families, communities, and religion before they can help themselves and their heterosexual neighbors to do what is beautiful, to achieve ethical refinement—"God enjoins acting justly and doing what is beautiful."[41]

At the end of the day, many Muslims will respond that it is too much for lesbian, gay, and transgendered Muslims to ask for Islam to change to accommodate them. However, this is not really what they are asking for. In reality, they assert that Islam must change to grow, to continue growing as it had in the past, confident that in facing new challenges with a keen sense of justice Muslims will renew the roots of their faith. Lesbian, gay, and transgendered Muslims assert that they may be agents in this slow but necessary change, along with women, youth, and other disempowered groups. But that is only because of God's granting them a pivotal place in the diversity of humanity—at the edge, a place of both danger and insight. In reality, they ask only to be treated as fully human, while those who believe insist on being recognized if not embraced as equals in faith. For they know that in the end, they are responsible before God through God's Prophet, rather than to any other authority; and God will ask whom they have injured in being homosexual or transgendered and who has committed injustice against them. They can answer with words the Prophet conveyed, "If I err, I err only against my own soul, and if I follow a right direction, it is because of what my lord reveals to me, for God is surely One who hears, an intimate One" (Qur'an 34:50).

NOTES

1. Scott Kugle, "Living Islam the Lesbian, Gay and Transgendered Way: a View of the Queer Jihad from Cape Town, South Africa," *ISIM Review* 16 (Summer 2005). I give many thanks to colleagues and friends in the Al-Fatiha Foundation, Salam Queer Community, The Inner Circle and other support groups for sharing their experiences and interpretations with me. All of them are reflected in this essay, with special thanks to Khalida, Daayiee Abdallah and Muhsin for offering constructive advice.

2. Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tawhid,* 2nd ed. (Beirut [Lebanon]: Dar el-Machreq Editeurs Sarl, 1982), 3.

3. Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, 10.

4. Though homosexuals and transgendered persons share many challenges, there are also important differences between them. In this chapter, I focus on homosexuality rather than transgender experiences, solely because of the limited space and not to imply any hierarchy of importance. I hope to give transgender experiences detailed attention in later writings.

5. Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Un-reading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002).

6. The Qur'an uses "colors" to speak of the varieties of plants which grow in the earth (16:13), of food crops (39:21), of fruits and soils (35:27), diverse hues and tastes of medicinal honey (16:69), as well the diverse natures of humankind, beasts of burden and animals of the fields (35:28).

7. Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 115–142

documents astrological theories of pre-determined sexual orientation common in Greek, Roman and Early Christian contexts.

8. Muhammad Omar Nahas, *al-Junusiyya: nahw namudhaj li-tafsir al-junusiyya* (Roermond, The Netherlands: Bureau Arabica, 1997). My own documentation of lesbian and gay Muslim's life stories can be found in Kugle, "Living Islam the Lesbian, Gay and Transgendered Way: a view of the Queer Jihad from Cape Town, South Africa," *ISIM Review* (August 2005).

9. Bukhari, *Sahih,* bk. 1, chap. 1, report 1.

10. Fakhr al-Din Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Cairo, 1346–1354 A.H.), 2:383.

11. For the use of "desire" in descriptions of heaven, see Qur'an 21:2, 41:31, 43:71, 16:57, 56:21 and 77:42. For the use of "desire" the fulfillment of which is absent in hell, see Qur'an 34:54.

12. See Qur'an 19:59, for example, where sensual desire and egoistic desire are juxtaposed to describe why people have perverted the prophets' teachings that have come before Islam.

13. Egoistic desire is clearly more dangerous than simply desiring bodily pleasure, for the legal terms for prostitution and violent rebellion are derived from the same linguistic root as *bagha*.

14. See Kugle, trans. *The Book of Illumination* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2005), 161–177.

15. See Scott Sirajul Haqq Kugle, "Sexuality, Diversity and Ethics," in *Progressive Muslims: on Gender, Justice and Pluralism,* ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2003) where I discuss in detail the interpretive assumptions of Tabari and Qurtubi. Others were more broad-minded to include same-sex acts as only one type of a range of actions that constituted their infidelity, from murder and robbery to public nudity, gambling and idolatrous worship (as mentioned in Surat al-'Ankabut 29-26-35).

16. Basim Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control Before the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

17. G..HA. Joynboll, "Sihak" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2nd ed., vol. 9, 565–566.

18. Amreen Jamel, "The Story of Lut and the Qur'an's Perception of the Morality of Same-Sex Sexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 41/1 (2001): 1–88.

19. The Companions of Rass are mentioned only in Qur'an 25:38 and 50:12; the cause of their destruction is never specified.

20. Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: a Short Introduction* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld, 2002) provides an excellent overview of the tools for and varieties of tafsir.

21. Historians who assert the "social construction" of homosexuality sometimes claim that homosexuals did not exist before the term was invented to name them; same-sex acts may always have existed between man and man or between woman and woman, they contend, but homosexuality as a concept did not. I would not go to this extreme, and instead follow a more moderate course between constructivism and essentialism, as charted by John, Boswell, "Concepts, Experience and Sexuality" in *Forms of Desire,* ed. E. Stein (New York: Routledge, 1992).

22. Zahir al-Din Miftahi, *Nasl-Kushi: ghayr-fitri jinsi maylan ya'ni 'amal qawm lut aur us ke dawa'i ki qabahat o mafasid pur pehli muhaqqiqana kitab* (Deoband, India: Salim Company, 1982), 20–21.

23. Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Joseph Alper, ed., *The Double-Edged Helix: Social Implications of Genetics in A Diverse Society* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), chaps 9–10.

24. There have been many proponents of Hadith scrutiny, from Syed Ahmed Khan in the mid-nineteenth century through the contemporary Muhammad al-Ghazali, in his *The Sunna of the Prophet: Between the Legists and the Traditionists* of 1989. For an excellent and even-handed summary of this debate, see Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 81–112.

25. Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-Arab fi Funun al-Adab* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1964), 206.

26. Arno Schmitt, ''Liwat im Fiqh: Männliche Homosexualität?'' *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 4 (2001–2002): 49–110 is the most complete study of the legal sources for rulings on male homosexual acts.

27. Malik ibn Anas, *al-Muwatta* (Lichtenstein: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000), Kitab al-Hudud 41, 41. chap. 1, report 11. "Malik told me [Yahya ibn Yahya al-Laythi] that he had asked Ibn Shihab [al-Zuhri] about those who commit the act of the people of Lot; Ibn Shihab said, 'He is to be stoned, whether he is married or unmarried.'"

28. Muhammad ibn Tahir Patani, *Tadhkirat al-Mawdu'at* (Bombay: Maktaba al-Qayyima, 1343 A.H.), 107.

29. Noor al-Deen Atabek, ''The Modernist Approach to Hadith Studies'' (2004), posted at IslamOnline www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2004/09/Article03.shtml.

30. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite:A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1991) presents this argument about misogynistic teaching alleged to be Prophetic Hadith.

31. This question will be addressed below in the section on ''pairs and partners.''

32. Hanafi jurists defended their caution against capital punishment by citing another hadith, "The blood of a Muslim is not liable to be shed, except in these three cases: fornication (*zina*) after marriage, infidelity after adopting Islam, and murdering an innocent person." See Abu Bakr Ahmad al-Jassas, *Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1978), 2:363.

33. Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992). The discussion will be refined and sharpened by the able analysis of Sa'diya Sheikh, *Spiritual Cartographies of Gender: Ibn Arabi and Sufi Discourses of Gender, Sexuality and Marriage* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, forthcoming).

34. Freud was the pioneer who rejected the conventional notion that sexuality is a ''problem'' to be solved by morality and convention and argued instead that sexuality was an inherent force in each person from infancy, a force that threatens social order but also can spur individuals to greater personal development and insight. Freud saw homosexuality as a pathological condition (rather than as a crime or sin), but psychologists who came after him have seen homosexuality as a deviation from the norm that

is not pathological, degenerative or liable to reduce the value of an individual within society. Jung reinterpreted Freud's ideas with greater attention to religion and spiritual archetypes, toward the goal of balance within the individual rather than conformity to social norms. Finally, Lacan refined psychoanalysis further, arguing that sexuality is not a primordial force in the personality as Freud theorized, but is rather one manifestation of the primal confrontation between self and other which shapes the ego at multiple levels, which brings psychoanalysis into even closer dialogue with Sufi metaphysics, as illustrated in Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and Islam* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).

35. Judges apply rational criteria to measure the situation: adult responsibility of the thief (*baligh* and *'aqil*), intent (*niya*), minimum value of the stolen object (*nihab*), type of good stolen (*mal*), relation of the thief to the victim, and the location of the stolen object (*hirz*), as described by David Forte, "Islamic Law and the Crime of Theft," *Cleveland State Law Review* (vol. 34–35), 54.

36. The best exposition of the purposes of the *Shari'a* (*maqasid*) which limit dogmatic literalism by rational understanding of social welfare is by the Maliki jurist Shatibi. His ideals are much needed today, and one work attempts to reintroduce them into contemporary discussions: Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Islamic Legal Philosophy: a Study of Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's Life and Thought* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1977).

37. Article available at www.tariqramadan.com/article.php3?id_article=0264&lang=en

38. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London, U.K.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

39. For instance, on 17 May, 2004, www.islamonline.net posted a *fatwa* to the query "My brother, who is not Muslim, is homosexual. Now it is legal in Ontario for same sex couples to get married. I am worried that he may wish to do this. I get along very well with my brother. In fact, when I became a Muslim he was the only one in my whole family who supported me and helped me. We are very close. If he decides to have a marriage ceremony, would I be committing a sin if I attended?" The response by a mufti in Toronto, calls homosexuality *fahsha*', an atrocious and obscene act, and states that "Islam teaches that believers should neither do obscene acts, nor in any way indulge in their propagation," quoting Qur'an 24:19: "Those who love to see obscenity published broadcast among the Believers will have a grievous penalty in this life and in the hereafter." The ruling offered is that "You are not allowed in Islam to attend a so-called marriage ceremony between homosexuals. By 'marrying' so, those people are waging an open war against Allah Almighty. Remember, homosexuality is the most heinous sin because of which Allah destroyed an entire nation. So, never mind your good relationship with your brother. You should never attend such a ceremony." There are several difficulties with this response. The verse quoted discusses the "obscenity" of false accusation of adultery (specifically about accusation against 'A'isha), not about any sex act or about homosexuality. The response also ignores the reality of law in Ontario, in which these "so-called marriages" are actual marriages. The ethics of commanding a brother to refuse to attend his brother's wedding is, of course, questionable.

40. Ahmad Zarruq, *Sharh Asma' Allah al-Husna* (mss. Rabat: al-Khizana al-'Amma), 249 paraphrases a teaching of Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258 CE).

41. Qur'an 16:90. "God enjoins acting justly and doing what is beautiful, providing for those near you in need and God forbids indecency, evil and rebellion, admonishing you so that you might be mindful." It is very significant that the formative principles of "acting justly and doing what is beautiful" come before specific ritual demands (providing for those in need through *Zakat*) and before legal or moral restraints (forbidding indecency, evil and rebellion).

8

Sufism in the West: Islam in an Interspiritual Age

Hugh Talat Halman

He who knows himself knows his Lord.

—Hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad[1]

There are as many ways to reach God as there are created souls.

—Hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad[2]

Lo, for to myself I am unknown, now in God's Name what must I do?
I adore not the Cross, nor the Crescent, I am not a Giaour or a Jew.

—Jalaluddin Rumi[3]

INTRODUCTION

Some might interpret these lines from the Prophet Muhammad and Jalaluddin Rumi as describing a ''spirituality'' beyond the conventional boundaries of religious affiliation. This kind of worldview has often been associated with a ''New Age Movement,'' or what some observers have now begun to call the ''Interspiritual Age''[4] and a ''second Axial age.''[5] Under whatever name, participants, advocates, and enthusiasts of this view envision personal, social, and ecological transformation rooted in universal peace and unity among religious traditions. This chapter explores how Islam might be related to this ''Interspirituality'' and if so, how. Is there a bridge between the Religion of the Final Prophet and the Age of Aquarius?

To explore this question, this chapter describes four universalist Sufi teachers and their movements: (1) Hazrat Inayat Khan, (2) Samuel Lewis, (3) Meher Baba, and (4) Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. These teachers and their

lineages had a major presence as New Religious Movements before and during the 1960s and 1970s when the New Age Movement emerged. Each teacher had an Islamic background and taught at least some elements of Islam. Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927) came to the United States from India in 1910 and became the first Sufi teacher in The United States and Europe. His son and successor Pir Vilayat Khan (1916–2004) presented Sufism with inspiration and vigor for 40 years during the New Age Movement's development. Samuel Lewis, a disciple of Hazrat Inayat Khan and "teacher to the hippies," introduced the popular "Sufi Dancing" in San Francisco in the late 1960s. Avatar Meher Baba (1894–1969) began coming to Europe and America in 1931, attracted "Baba lovers," established centers worldwide, and chartered a Sufi organization. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (1884–1986) came from Sri Lanka to Philadelphia in 1971 and developed the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship. He also encouraged Coleman Barks to translate the poetry of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273 CE) a process that resulted in Rumi becoming popularly described as "America's best-selling poet." All of these teachers have been recorded in film and audio formats.

In the 1970s New Age participants—both practitioners and consumers—pursued psychotherapies, social movements, and cosmologies connected by an alternative "holistic" framework.[6] This movement was summarized in Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy* as a "Paradigm Shift," or a transformation of "worldview" and "practices." Ferguson's holistic paradigm emphasized humankind's shared interconnectedness and the individual and collective power to create change.

> The social activism of the 1960s and the "consciousness revolution" of the early 1970s seemed to be moving toward a historic synthesis: social transformation resulting from personal transformation—change from the inside out.[7]

This description suggests that the movement emerged with the baby-boomer and post baby-boomer generations. Once the 1965 Immigration Act lifted quotas for Asians, numerous spiritual teachers came to the United States, especially from India and Japan. Additionally global mass media, the civil rights movement, the counter culture, the Peace Movement, feminism, world music, and Internet technology all further contributed to developing conditions setting the stage for the Interspiritual Age.

Sociologist Steve Bruce[8] presents a four-part model to describe the New Age Movement:

New Science/New Paradigm. People who identify themselves, or are labeled as proponents of a New Age culture typically borrow, embrace, and apply new philosophies of science as a teaching about spirituality. They apply holistic methods based on the interconnection of matter and energy, especially in pursuit of healing—personal, social, and planetary.

New Ecology. The New Age vision sees the earth as a holistic organism and its proponents are devoted to developing new ways to take care of the earth and ways of living in communities which nurture that goal, especially through ''intentional communities'' such as Findhorn in Scotland and Auroville in south India. This perspective is at the root of such early New Age classics as Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* and James Lovelock's *Gaia.*

New Psychology. The New Age Movement embraces psychological models such as Transpersonal and Depth Psychology that envision mental health as reaching beyond normal functioning to release a human being's fullest potential.

New Spirituality. Some examples we would list include:

- Yoga (Swami Satcidananda, Swami Muktananda)
- Organic Gardening and Whole Foods
- Environmentalism and Ecology (Stewart Brand, James Lovelock)
- Green Peace
- Transpersonal Psychology (Baba Ram Das, Ken Wilbur)
- Mother Goddess Worship (Starhawk)
- Quantum Physics and the New Physics (David Bohm, Fritjof Capra)
- Alternative and Complementary Medicine (Deepak Chopra, Larry Dossey)
- Creation Spirituality (Matthew Fox)
- Quantum Healing (Deepak Chopra)
- Interspirituality (Wayne Teasdale)
- Integral Philosophy (Ken Wilbur)
- Biology (Rupert Sheldrake)
- Pagan Spirituality (Starhawk)

Brother Wayne Teasdale identified this new paradigm as the ''Interspiritual Age,'' which he described as a ''dawn of a new consciousness'' marked by seven shifts in our understanding: (1) ecological awareness; (2) sensing the rights of other species; (3) recognizing our interdependence; (4) abandoning ''militant nationalism'' and embracing ''essential interdependence''; (5) experiencing community between and among religions; (6) opening to the inner treasures of the world's religions through their individual members; and (7) opening to the cosmos and the ''larger community of the universe.''[9] One important difference in Teasdales' concept of an Interspritual Age relates to the question of relativism. Teasdale, who practiced both Christian and Buddhist monasticism, ultimately advocated standing in one tradition as one's root. His own teacher the Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths (d. 1993) who was one of the twentieth century's most outstanding

practitioners of the dialogue between Christian and Hindu ideas and experience remained a Christian even though he had also taken Hindu renunciant (*sannyasi*) vows. Many who have belonged to the ''New Age Movement'' have rejected such exclusive identification as a limitation on spiritual unfolding.

Karen Armstrong calls our period a ''second Axial Age,'' tracing its roots to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when colonialism and later, globalization triggered significant social, political, economic and intellectual revolutions. In response to these revolutions, as Armstrong describes it, people have begun seeking ''new ways of being religious'' by ''building on the insights of the past.'' Armstrong notes the similarity of these approaches to the first Axial Age (800–500 BCE) when many of the world's religions came into being. She points to a similar combination of ''. . .a recoil from violence with looking into the heart''[10] joined with the search for ''an absolute reality in the depths of [one's own] being.''[11] Unlike Teasdale, Armstrong (a former nun) no longer belongs to a formal religion.

SYNCRETISM IN ISLAM; SYNCRETISM IN THE INTERSPIRITUAL AGE

The Interspiritual Age is partly characterized by trends toward synthesis and syncretism. Have Muslims engaged in similar tendencies? Throughout Islamic history we find Muslims who have creatively combined religious ideas and practices. Especially in Africa, Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, India, China, and Indonesia, we find that this syncretism contributed to the spread of Islam, For example in Indonesia, some of the nine saints (*Wali Songo*) who spread Islam in Java adapted the Javanese Hindu versions of the heroic Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* to teach and spread Islam. What differentiates Islamic syncretism from New Age syncretism is that many in the New Age Movement have not considered one religion to be the final and supreme revelation and overarching metanarrative.

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF ISLAM

Many Muslims describe Islam in two aspects and four dimensions. Because the four teachers discussed here use these models, they are essential for our comparison. Here we will look at some examples from Indonesia and Turkey. Muslims speak of two parts of Islam: the outer or exoteric (*zahir*) and the inner or esoteric (*batin*) (Qur'an 57:2). From this pair the four dimensions unfold. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz[12] reports how an Indonesian Muslim explained them: (1)*Shariʿa,* involves ''the carrying out of the usual duties of Islam.'' *Shariʿa* describes normative doctrines, rituals, and mainstream community organization(s); (2) *Tariqa,*

includes "the special mystical techniques." *Tariqa* ("the path") encompasses the fellowship, spiritual practices, and relationship to spiritual teachers and guides, that is, Sufism; (3) *Haqiqa* means truth, reality, and realization of mystical union; (4) *Ma'rifat* translates as *gnosis,* meaning inner discernment.It is these three dimensions beyond *Shari'a* which provide a useful way to compare Islam with the New Age Movement.

In Turkey, John Birge received this explanation following the analogy of sugar:

> One can go to the dictionary and find out what sugar is and how it is used. That is the *Shari'a* Gateway to knowledge. One feels the inadequacy of that when one is introduced directly to the practical seeing and handling of sugar. That represents the *Tariqa* Gateway to knowledge. To actually taste sugar and have it enter into oneself is to go one step deeper into an appreciation of its nature, and that is what is meant by *ma'rifat* If one could go still further and become one with sugar so that he could say, "I am sugar," that and that alone would be to know what sugar is, and that is what is involved in the *Haqiqa* Gateway. (Birge, p. 102)

This *haqiqa* experience of mystical union, also called in classical Sufism *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of existence) and *wahdat al-shuhud* (the experience of oneness), provides an important correlation between Islamic and Interspiritual thinking. This perspective is an example of what Teasdale in his sixth point calls "one of the inner treasures of the worlds' religions."[13]

Now we turn to assess four significant Sufi teachers who led movements in Europe and America and evaluate how they may have helped contribute to the Interspiritual Age.

Pir-O Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927)

One of the most significant presences in American Sufism has been Pir-O Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan. Inayat Khan was a harbinger of the attitudes, styles, and approaches of the Interspiritual Age whose influence extended to contact with thousands of people in at least eight countries in Europe and America, including composer Claude Debussy, the pianist Scriabin, psychologist Roberto Assagioli, and automaker Henry Ford. Inayat Khan was a master musician who had also trained in Sufism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism. Fluent in English and highly charismatic, he has the distinction of being one of the earliest Islamic teachers in the United States (1910) as well as being the first teacher of Sufism in Europe and America. In 16 years of public teaching, he initiated 200–300 people including four women whom he appointed as *murshidas* (spiritual guides). As he introduced a Universal Sufism in the context of what he called "spiritual liberty," thousands of people encountered basic elements of Islamic teaching, culture, and spirituality.

His collected works, *The Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty* comprise 14 volumes. To date his teachings have been published under at least 40 titles. Currently the first four volumes of an ongoing reediting of his *Collected Works* have been published. His work has continued as a major presence in American Sufism and in the New Age Movement through his major successors, his son Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916–2004) and Murshid Samuel Ahmad Murad "Sufi Sam" Chishti Lewis (1896–1971) as well as others we will mention.

Born in Baroda, India, his grandfather founded a music academy and his father was also a master musician and singer. In addition to attending a Hindu school, Inayat Khan witnessed and met musicians and other family friends and associates from diverse religious backgrounds. After close training with his grandfather, Inayat Khan toured India as a young boy and was honored by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Under the auspices of his virtuoso family of musicians Inayat Khan became a master of the *vina,* India's oldest musical instrument.

His parents brought him to yogis, saints, and sages of Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi (Indian Zoroastrian) backgrounds. In Nepal he met an old Sufi master whose glance charged him with exaltation. After working as a music professor, Inayat Khan then traveled throughout India alone and saw in a dream a beautiful face, a vision he took as a sign to search for a spiritual guide (*murshid*). In Hyderabad, in 1903, he saw the man whose face he had seen in the dream: Sayyid Mohammed Abu Hashim Madani. Until his death in 1907 Madani served as both Inayat Khan's initiatic and academic teacher in Sufism and issued Inayat Khan the following commission: "Go, my child, into the world, harmonize the East and the West with the harmony of thy music; spread the wisdom of Sufism, for thou art gifted by Allah, the most Merciful and Compassionate." Later that year Inayat Khan met with the prominent Brahman guru Manik Prabhu who deepened his understanding of the link between Sufism's doctrine of oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) and Vedanta's non-duality (*advaita*). Inayat Khan's particular lineage the Chishtiyya provided him with an example of initiating non-Muslims into Sufism.[14]

At a musical presentation at the Hindu Temple in San Francisco in 1911, Inayat Khan met Ada Martin, whom he initiated with the name Rabia and whom he ultimately designated as his immediate successor. In 1915, after traveling in America, Russia, and England, Inayat Khan established the headquarters of the International Sufi Order in London. At this time, he composed an as-yet unpublished spiritual biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Within a few years though, some of the Muslim members of the Sufi Order asked Inayat Khan to require the non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Instead Inayat Khan upheld the right and value of each person to seek truth under the Murshid's guidance without being required to label

themselves, and without the requirement to accept, reject, or adopt a particular faith or creed.[15]

Indeed Inayat Khan's sense of the ''Message'' and his ''mission'' involved restraint with regard to religious doctrine. His first book, aptly titled, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty,* opens: ''Beloved ones of Allah, you may belong to any race, caste, creed, or nation, still you are all impartially loved of Allah.''[16] And Inayat Khan inventively expressed the integral relationship between Sufism and Islam: ''The idea that Sufism sprang from Islam or from any other religion, is not necessarily true; yet it might be rightly called the spirit of Islam, as well as the pure essence of all religions and philosophies.''[17]

Inayat Khan's description of the Prophet Muhammad's mission illustrates how he envisioned Islam beyond dogma:

> At last he began to hear a word of inner guidance, ''Cry out the sacred name of thy Lord''; and as he began to follow this advice, he found the echo of the word which his heart repeated in the whole of nature.... When once he was in tune with the Infinite, realizing his soul to be one, within and without the call came, ''Thou art the man; go forward into the world and carry out our Command; glorify the Name of God; unite those who are separated; waken those who are asleep, and harmonize one with the other, for in this lies the happiness of man.''[18]

Inayat Khan emphasized that Islam was a revelation based on the theophany of nature. While most Muslims share this perspective, Inayat Khan's special emphasis on nature as scripture heralds values that will emerge in the New Age Movement :

> Islamic worship shows an improvement upon the older forms of worship in human evolution, for Islam prefers nature to art and sees in nature the immanence of God.... It is said, ''Cry aloud the name of thy Lord, the most beneficent, who hath by his nature's skilful pen taught man what he knew not,'' which means: who has written this world like a manuscript with the pen of nature. If one desires to read the Holy Book, one should read it in nature.[19]

These references to the ''tongue of nature'' and the ''pen of nature'' reach succinct expression in Inayat Khan's third of ''Ten Sufi Thoughts'': ''There is one Holy Book, the sacred manuscript of nature, the only scripture which can enlighten the reader.''

In his first book, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty,* Inayat Khan described the ultimacy of the Prophet Muhammad's mission and of Islam:

> ...[T]he work was thus continued by all the prophets until Mohammed, the *Khatim al-Mursalin,* the last messenger of divine wisdom and the seal of the prophets, came on his mission, and in his turn gave the final statement of

> divine wisdom, "None exists but Allah". . . . There was no necessity left for any more prophets after this divine message, which created the spirit of democracy in religion by recognizing God in every being. By this message man received the knowledge that he may attain the highest perfection under the guidance of a perfect *murshid* or spritual teacher.[20]

Inayat Khan's position on the Prophet Muhammad differentiates him from New Age thinkers who more readily rank Christ or Buddha as exemplars of New Age values. Although Inayat Khan did not require his initiates to become Muslim, but instead stressed the primacy of mystical realization lying outside conventional doctrinal and institutional boundaries, he still affirmed the supremacy of Muhammad's mission and revelation as final and as an integrating context for all forms of religious and spiritual expression. Lewis later recounted: "In his first sessions on Sufism, Pir-O-Murshid placed Muhammad as the Perfect Man of All Times."[21]

Inayat Khan describes the four stages of Sufism *Shari'a* (Law), *tariqa* (Way), *haqiqa* (Truth), and *ma'rifat* (Knowledge) in a way that prefigures Interspiritual Age ideals of flexibility:

> Although the religious authorities of Islam have limited this law to restrictions, yet in a thousand places in the Qur'an and Hadith one can trace how the law of Shariat is meant to be subject to change, in order to suit the time and place.[22]

After explaining *tariqa* as understanding the cause behind *Shari'a,* he describes *haqiqa* and *ma'rifat* as:

> . . . knowing the truth of our being and the inner laws of nature. This knowledge widens man's heart . . . he has realized the one Being. . . . This is the grade in which religion ends and Sufism begins. *Marefat* means the actual realization of God, the one Being where there is no doubt any more.[23]

Sufism, he concludes, arises from attaining all four levels, which are the "inner teachings of the knowledge of God" into which the Prophet Muhammad initiated Ali and Abu Bakr.[24] Inayat Khan did not train his children to perform the *Salat* prayer and did not continue to practice *Salat* after he came to the West. He did, however, instruct his *murida* (disciple) Rabia Martin to learn and practice *Salat,* but not in order to become a Muslim.[25] In India Inayat Khan had practiced *Salat* and other Islamic observances, but ceased after coming to America and Europe.

Instead of *Salat,* Inayat Khan instituted a new prayer regimen. The core prayer known as the Invocation reads:

> Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
> the Only Being United with All the Illuminated Souls
> who form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Inayat Khan understood all the Prophets and Masters as part of one being. In this he had behind him the Sufi tradition of the *Nur Muhammad*,[26] the idea that all the Prophets emanated from one primordial ''Light of Muhammad.'' In Inayat Khan's text of the afternoon prayer, devotees address the ''Master, Messiah, and Savior of all Humanity'':

> Allow us to recognize Thee in all Thy holy names and forms:
> as Rama, as Krishna, as Shiva, as Buddha,
> Let us know Thee as Abraham, as Solomon, as Zarathustra,
> as Moses, as Jesus, as Muhammad, and in many other names
> and forms known and unknown to the world...
> O Messenger! Christ! Nabi the Rasul of God.[27]

The Sufi Order's five ''concentrations'' established by Inayat Khan embody Interspiritual Age ideals and practices: the Universal Worship, the Esoteric School, the Healing Order, Ziraat (Gardening), and the Kinship Concentration.

Originally intended as the Sufi Order's public face, Universal Worship expresses the New Age ideal of honoring all religions. Its worship service features candles for each of the major traditions and one for all traditions unnamed or unknown ''who have held aloft the light of truth.'' Also named the Church of All and All Churches, its ministers (*Cherags,* ''lamps'') perform marriages and other sacraments. When Inayat Khan offered Universal Worship in New York on May 7, 1921, 50 people attended. In 1926, 500 people attended.

The Esoteric School encompasses the framework of a relationship between *murids* (disciples) and *murshids* (guides) who have been empowered by the Pir. The current Pir is Hazrat Inayat Khan's grandson, Pir Zia Inayat Khan (b. 1971) who continues to develop the curriculum of his father and grandfather. *Murshids* concentrate on guiding *murids* in their practices and aim to avoid the guru-like intercession of advising *murids'* on all areas of their lives. By doing these practices, *murids* are meant to develop their ''inner guidance.'' The Esoteric School also offers retreats ranging between one and forty days.

The Healing Order, begun in 1925, offers a group healing service that attends to healing at a distance through attunement, prayer, breath, and concentration. Since 1979, the Sufi Healing Order has organized 26 national conferences on science and spirituality. Led until recently by Himayati Inayati (John Johnson) the Healing Order also features a more comprehensive healing modality called the Raphaelite Work (named after the angel of healing). As in many New Age healing movements, ''healing'' is distinguished from ''curing'' by focusing primarily on the transformation of consciousness, the healing of the heart and soul, or the improvement of quality of life of the person healed.

The Ziraat Concentration uses farming as a metaphor and a spiritual practice for transformation, restoring harmony between the inner and outer: "We respond to the call to become mature gardeners of both our inner being and of our planet." Ziraat cultivates the sacredness of life through meditation, horticulture, and environmentalism. Pir Vilayat linked Ziraat's agricultural mystery rite to deep ecology.[28]

The Kinship Concentration (originally called Brotherhood) is rooted in the universal morality of caring for one another. This service includes work in schools, food banks, counseling, birthing and health clinics, prison book funds, to say nothing of the Hope Project in Delhi. The Hope Project "provides food, education, medical and social services for the destitute shanty dwellers surrounding the tomb of Hazrat Inayat Khan in Delhi."[29]

In 1912 Inayat Khan married an American, Ora Ray Baker (renamed Amina Begum), with whom he sired four children. His eldest son Pir Vilayat was born in London in 1916. Archival film shows Hazrat Inayat Khan in the year before his death passing on succession to Vilayat, who was then ten years old. In World War II, Pir Vilayat served as a minesweeper and later as a journalist in North Africa, and his reporting aroused international acclamation.[30] Vilayat also studied with the Islamic Philosopher Henry Corbin at the Sorbonne where he received his Ph.D. After the war, he traveled throughout India and other countries seeking out "dervishes, Hindu yogis, and *rishis* as well as Buddhist and Christian monks."[31] Since a number of his father's relatives and others had also laid claim to succession,[32] in 1957, Pir Vilayat revived the Sufi Order his father had chartered in London in 1915 and named it the Sufi Order in the West (later, Sufi Order International). Pir Vilayat was not at odds with the other successors but was committed to fulfilling his father's commission.[33] Toward that end he had received authorization to teach from Pir Fakhruddin, the son of Abu Hashim Madani, his father's Chishti *pir*. In the 1970s he established a Sufi Community, the Abode of the Message in New Lebanon, New York, and later the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, a commercial New Age Workshop facility.

Author of seven books and many articles, Pir Vilayat was admired by his followers as a meditation master, and as an inspired teacher who lucidly invigorated and updated diverse spiritual teachings into an integral framework. He was fond of interpreting the Qur'anic phrase "...light upon light..." as describing "the light of intelligence strikes and your whole aura bursts into brightness more intensely than ever before."[34] In teaching the practice of *dhikr* repeating *la ilaha illa Allah,* Pir Vilayat combines spiritual and scientific references as he describes "...building a temple of light out of the fabric of our aura and a temple of magnetism out of electromagnetic fields, with our heart as the altar in this temple."[35] Concerning the Prophet Muhammad, Pir Vilayat explains that "[Muhammad] gave the final statement of Divine Wisdom: 'None exists but Allah.'"[36] Describing the "spirituality of the future," Pir Vilayat sets forth three points similar to the character of the

Interspiritual Age: (1) it will be a spirituality free of dogma and ''replacing theoretical belief with direct mystical experience; (2) ''...a recognition of the need for seekers to trust their conscience and assume responsibility... rather than relying on role models to dictate prescriptive 'do's and don't's' ''; and (3) an new image of the Divine: ''...the Universe is a Global Being of which the cosmos is a body whose intelligence flashes through our thoughts and emotions....''[37]

Pir Vilayat's son and successor Pir Zia Inayat Khan (1971–) who received investiture in 2001 also traveled widely to study with Sufi masters. He holds a B.A. from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and an M.A. from Duke University. When Pir Vilayat brought Pir Zia[38] to study Buddhism under the auspices of the Dalai Lama, Kalu Rinpoche, a highly respected Kagyu master, bestowed on Pir Zia the designation of *tulku*—a reborn Tibetan teacher. Pir Zia decided that since he did not remember his previous life as a *tulku* and that it made no sense to him, he would rather not accept the honor. In this decision he also consulted with the Dalai Lama.[39] Since assuming the mantle of succession, Pir Zia has encouraged traditional Muslim practice in the Sufi Order. This is reflected in inviting Imam Bilal Hyde to offer seminars in Islam at the Abode of the Message and on the Anjumani Listserve. Pir Zia also brings a renewed appreciation of the Indian Chishti Sufi lineage from which the Inayati–Chishti lineage stems. Members visit the tombs of both Hazrat Inayat Khan in Delhi and Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer. A recent initiative by Pir Zia is the Suluk Academy of Sufi Studies. Its brochure states:

> The Suluk Academy offers a course of focused spiritual study to cultivate meditative techniques and perspectives grounded in the traditional yoga of Sufism (*suluk*) which support the natural unfoldment of the soul in life.[40]

In 2006, the Academy will offer a course on ''Green Hermeticism.'' Its three teachers bring eclectic backgrounds in alchemy, Kabbalah, herbal medicine, Celtic Christianity, and Sufism—both mainstream and antinomian. In addition to theoretical study, participants will practice *spagyrics* (plant alchemy), investigating how this knowledge can address ecological problems. [41]

Inayat Khan, as a virtuoso musician, was very much a forerunner of the New Age Movement which appreciates music as a spiritual and healing resource. But Inayat Khan sacrificed his own musical career to teach and did not incorporate music directly into his teaching. That musical impulse would revive through Samuel Lewis.

Samuel Ahmad Murad Chisti (Samuel L. Lewis) (1896–1971)

Lewis is probably the most actively eclectic spiritual explorer in this chapter. After majoring in Agriculture at Columbia University, he began in

1919 to live in an intentional community of Sufis in Fairfax, California that practiced the teachings of Inayat Khan.

Initiated in 1923 by Inayat Khan, Lewis was both overwhelmed by a blinding light and comforted by a kind presence. In comparison to Rinzai Zen masters Sogaku Shaku, Shaku Soyen, and Nyogen Senzaki with whom he had studied, he felt that Inayat Khan was the "first person to deeply touch and awaken his heart." (Lewis often wrote in the third person.) During a retreat in Fairfax in 1925, Lewis received three visitations from the immortal Prophet Khidr[42] who conferred the gifts of poetry and music. These visits were followed by the appearances of Shiva, Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and finally Elijah who bestowed "the Robe."[43] In 1926, after six interviews with Lewis, Inayat Khan conferred upon him the title "Protector of the Message."

While continuing his Zen training, in 1938 Lewis met Ramana Maharshi's disciple Paul Brunton with whom he achieved immediate *samadhi* (divine union). After Rabia Martin turned over authority for the Sufi Order to Meher Baba (see a discussion of this below), Lewis, who disagreed with this decision, maintained his contact with Inayat Khan on the inner planes. In 1946 the Prophets Muhammad and Jesus appeared to Lewis:

> Around 1946, the writer entered into *fana-fi-rassul* [absorption into the Prophet Muhammad]. Although this came from Mohammed, the Khatimal Mursaleen [Seal of the Chain-of-Prophets], it was followed almost immediately by a similar experience with Jesus (Isa).[44]

After this visit with Brunton, Lewis received the name Ahmad Murad. In 1947, he experienced an inner visit from Inayat Khan who assigned him to the direct guidance of Jesus and Muhammad.

In the 1950s and 1960s Lewis worked on salt-water conversion projects. Then after reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, he worked on nonpoisonous pesticides at City College of San Francisco. In addition he proposed a comprehensive agricultural program inspired by Islamic symbolism in which North African soil would be rejuvenated through planting dates, figs, olives, and grapes. He traveled widely, especially to Egypt, India, and Japan and studied with Sufi, Hindu, and Buddhist masters.

In 1956 in Japan Lewis said the relationship between Amida Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha, "is exactly the same as that between Allah and Muhammad."[45] Lewis later declared: "Both Sufism and Mahayana Buddhism teach the transcendentalism intuition (*kashf* or *prajna* and no-nonsense)."[46] His ecumenism and intention to harmonize religion and science exemplify ideals of the New Age Movement and the Interspiritual Age.

Lewis trained further with Zen and Sufi masters before returning to America in 1962. Pir Maulana Abdul Ghafor, a Chishti shaykh, initiated Lewis and appointed him to serve as a spiritual inspiration like Shams-i

Tabrizi to Inayat Khan's disciples. Lewis maintained that his authority as a Sufi teacher derived from his training with numerous Sufis, especially five: Inayat Khan, Abdul Ghafor, Barakat Ali, Pir Dewal Shereef (President of the Board of Directors of Islamabad University), and Sidi Abusalam al-Alawi.[47] Murshid Sam wrote, ''I never used this term 'Sufi' [as a self-referential title] until it was publicly announced by Pir Sufi Barakat Ali of the Chishti Order in 1961 at Salarwala, West Pakistan.''[48] From this point Lewis would be known as Murshid S.A.M. (Samuel Ahmad Murshid).

In April 1967, while hospitalized for ptomaine poisoning, ''. . . the voice of Allah appeared to Lewis and said, 'I make you spiritual teacher to the hippies.' ''[49] These words came to life in 'Sufi Dancing.'' Lewis made a direct and lasting Sufi contribution to the New Age Movement through these ''Dervish Dances'' (now, the ''Dances of Universal Peace''):

> Well, the voice of Allah came to me and presented more visions of Dervish Dances. These dances are based only slightly on the methods of the Mevlevi School. They have in them elements of the Rufai and Bedawi [Sufi] Schools. And along with them the operative aspects of *kashf* [insight]. . . . [A]nd from that moment a new type of *Qawwal* [sacred song] was born.[50]

Lewis claimed a divine and Islamic inspiration for the dances and described some of the chanting as *qawwal,* a South Asian devotional genre. As he continued to ''receive'' these dances he consulted with Ruth St. Denis ''my fairy godmother, so to speak.''[51] Again we see a truly New Age eclecticism. The dances integrated singing and dancing from all the sacred traditions of the world. Some of the earliest included *Bismillah; As-Salaam Aleikum; Ya Hayy, Ya Haqq; Ya Muhammad Abdullah;* together with Hindu and Christian dances. This syncretistic and inclusive framework certainly belongs to the New Age Movement. Lewis wrote in 1970: ''My friends, it is a New Age. It is an age of warm delight in the Divine Presence.''[52]

Nonetheless Lewis affirmed the Prophet Muhammad's supremacy because he lived a perfect life in an ''operative world'':

> The Bible says that God created Adam in His image, but Adam is usually associated with ''sin.'' There had to be a ''perfect man'' for redemption. . . . But the Buddhist does not live like the Buddha, nor the Christian like Christ, nor the Hindu like Ram or Krishna. We wish to live in an operative world—to raise families and go into business and study and do all those things which we consider human. It is on this point that Muhammad excels. He does not excel in being nearer to God, the Creator, but he does excel in being closer to man, the created. [53]

In this spirit of simplicity, Samuel Lewis summarized his teaching in these words of the communal spirit: ''Eat, pray, and dance together.'' Lewis believed that three figures from the Islamic world offered particularly valuable

policies that might be applied today: the Caliph 'Umar (d. 644 CE), Sultan Salahaddin (d. 1193 CE), and Suleiman the Magnificent (d. 1566 CE).[54]

Lewis appointed Moinuddin Carl Jablonski (1942–2001) as the *khalif* (designated leader) of the SIRS (Sufi Ruhaniat Islamia Society), now Sufi Ruhaniat International (SRI). Pir Vilayat also initiated Jablonski as a *murshid*, but in SIRS. In 1977 SIRS, as part of an effort to make the murshid-murid relationship more central than in the formal organization, Jablonski decided to separate SIRS from the Sufi Order but to continue its sisterhood relationship to both the Sufi Order and the (European) Sufi Movement. Jablonski integrated a system of psychotherapy counselling from Frida Waterhouse called Soulwork to aid *murids* in both achieving psychological unity and refraining from overemphasizing transcendence. As his successor, Jablonski appointed another former student of Murshid Samuel Lewis, Shabda Khan, who is also a master vocalist and musician trained in classical Indian music.

Another prominent Ruhaniat leader, Saadi Neil Douglas-Klotz, has led the Dances of Universal Peace Movement. Under his auspices the catalog of dances now number at least 400. Klotz also leads a national movement of people studying, chanting, and dancing the words and prayers of Jesus in Aramaic.[55] Saadi uses distinctive etymologies of Arabic words as he learned them from his Pakistani Qur'an teacher Shemsuddin Ahmed. Introducing the workings of Semitic languages, he encourages people to meditate on them in the heart in order to open more mystical levels of meaning. In his most recent book he poetically presents the Names of God as "pathways of the heart" serving as techniques of meditation. The first meditation in the book is typical:

> With one hand lightly on your heart, breathe easily and gently. Feel the awareness of breath and heartbeat creating a clear, spacious place inside. Breathe with the sound *bismillah* (Bis-MiLLaaH). When we remember to connect our heart to the Heart of the Cosmos, we recall that, as the Sufis say, "God is your lover, nor your jailer."[56]

The Dances of Universal Peace have become mainstreamed and autonomous. Not only are they performed in the Sufi Order, but free dances open to the public are offered around the world. This innovative form of worship, syncretic in both its religious and its cultural framework, is one of the most obvious Sufi contributions to the New Age Movement and the Interspiritual Age.

Meher Baba (1894–1969)

Meher Baba declared that he was the Avatar, the manifestation of God in human form, not merely a teacher, but an awakener, sent to awaken love

through the power of divine love. He claimed to have lived before as Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad. This list echoes Inayat Khan's prayer ''Saum'' and Meher Baba's claim to be Muhammad locates him squarely in our discussion of teachers who are both steeped in either Islam or Sufism and who are also harbingers of the New Age Movement and the Interspiritual Age. He transmitted Sufi teachings to disciples in Europe, America, Australia, New Zealand, and around the globe. By 1958, he had established two teaching centers in America, one in Australia, and one in London. He represents a specific link between Sufism and the Interspiritual Age. In addition, he attempted to ''re-orient'' Inayat Khan's Sufi Order.

Born in 1894 to a family of Parsis (Zoroastrians who emigrated from Iran to India beginning in the tenth century CE) in Mumbai, he was introduced to Sufism by his father Sheriar who had wandered as a dervish (Sufi mendicant) for 18 years in both Iran and India. Of five Indian ''perfect masters'' who initiated Meher Baba three had Muslim backgrounds. Meher Baba's own teaching is infused with the Sufism of Persian and Indian cultures, especially from Hafiz (d. 1389 CE) and Rumi (d. 1273 CE).

Meher Baba's teachings pointed beyond the boundaries of scriptures, practices, and institutions:

> I am not come to establish any cult, society, or organization; nor even to establish a new religion. The religion that I shall give teaches the Knowledge of the One behind the many. The book that I shall make people read is the book of the heart that holds the key to the mystery of life. I shall bring about a happy blending of the head and the heart. I shall revitalize all religions and cults, and bring them together like beads on one string.[57]

Meher Baba declared the oneness of religious truth in love:

> There is no difference in the realization of Truth either by a Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian, or Christian. The difference is only in words and terms. Truth is not the monopoly of a particular race or religion.[58]
>
> I belong to no religion. Every religion belongs to me. My personal religion is being the Ancient Infinite One. And the religion I impart to all is love for God, which is the truth of all religions.[59]

Meher Baba culled from a variety of traditions, mostly those of his previous Avataric manifestations as well the ''perfect masters'' Rumi, Hafiz, Ramakrishna, Tukaram, Kabir, Milarepa, and St. Francis.[60]

In one of his two most important books, *God Speaks* Meher Baba takes a famous poem by Rumi as his point of departure to describe and explain in detail how souls return to God. This can be a challenging poem for some Muslims since it seems to carry overtones of metempsychosis:

I died as a mineral and became a plant,
I died as a plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was Man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar
With angels blest; but even from angelhood
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.
Oh, let me not exist! For Non-existence proclaims
In organ tones. "To Him we shall return." [61]

This poem expresses God's immanent and empathetic experience as He participates in all levels of being. (The Qur'an teaches that God sees through the eyes of all creatures [Surat al-An'am (6):103].) God here is the subject, the "I," who progresses through each of these stages. Meher Baba, teaching that each soul is an individual "drop" of the divine ocean returning to the divine ocean, sustains both this reading and his teaching that the soul transmigrates.

Meher Baba explains the journey Rumi describes in three parts: "evolution," "reincarnation," and "involution." In "evolution" the soul traces a path through the physical universe: gaseous forms; stone; metal; vegetable; worm, insect, and reptile; fish; bird; and animal; before finally reaching human form. In "reincarnation" the human soul goes through repeated rebirths and through its thoughts, words, and actions acquires new "impressions" (patterns, *samskara* [s]). As these impressions wind around it, they veil the soul from God's presence. However, ultimately through rebirths characterized by morality, spiritual work and divine grace these impressions loosen and unwind until they progressively wear away. After evolution and reincarnation the soul moves into its third phase: "involution." In this phase the soul passes beyond the first body, the "gross body" of human incarnation.

Involution takes the soul on a journey through seven planes. The first six planes are contained in two "bodies" or "spheres." In involution the soul first progresses to the "subtle body" which contains energy impressions. Next the soul moves into the "mental body" filled with impressions of instinct, intellect, emotion, and desire, before the soul completes its return to God. Located in the planes of the "subtle body" (the first four planes in a series of seven) are "psychic" or "magical" experiences and powers. In the "subtle body" one experiences—and is in danger of becoming distracted by—a variety of paranormal phenomena: images, colors, bright lights, circles, fragrances, music, and so on.

The fifth and sixth planes of the "mental body" symbolize the purification of mind and heart: "...Those belonging to the mental sphere only use their powers for the good of others."[62] The "mental body" planes also describe the spiritual attainments of various holy people. The fifth plane represents

those known as *wali* (lit., "friend of God") the saints and yogis. The sixth plane includes the perfect masters: *murshid* (lit., "guide") and *pir* (elder). Those on the sixth plane see God face to face. The *qutb* (lit., "pivotal saint," or perfect master) stands beyond these on a "seventh plane," in a state Meher Baba describes as "God's realization of Himself as Infinite."

Using traditional Sufi terms, Meher Baba describes the seventh plane as that of *fana'* ("passing-away into God [becoming God]") and the immediate stage beyond it as *baqa'* ("abiding in God [being God]"). Beyond these two journeys, only five perfect masters in the position of *qutubiat* (central saints) embark on the third journey in which they are "living God's life (living both as God and man simultaneously)."[63] Meher Baba considered Inayat Khan a "sixth-plane" saint.

In *God Speaks* Meher Baba included a commentary on his text written by 'Abdul Ghani Munsiff, a Muslim disciple among the earliest of Meher Baba's *mandali* (inner circle of disciples). 'Abdul Ghani's commentary expresses the ideas of *God Speaks* mostly in Persian Sufi terms frequently quoting the Sufi poetry of Hafiz-i Shirazi (d. 1389 CE). Meher Baba repeatedly showed his supreme appreciation and reverence for Hafiz, whom he described as: "a Persian poet who was a Perfect Master."[64] Two hours before he died Meher Baba dictated three of Hafiz's couplets to be inscribed on his tomb.

In 1931, Meher Baba explained his mission in New Age terms:

> I intend to bring together all religions and cults like beads on one string and to revitalize them for individual and collective needs. This is my mission in the West. The peace and harmony that I talk of and that will settle on the face of this worried world are not far off. [65]

Meher Baba also chartered a Sufi organization, "Sufism Re-Oriented." Inayat Khan's successor Rabia Martin and her disciple Ivy Duce both followed Meher Baba. Duce, who felt unequipped to succeed Martin, asked Meher Baba for help. On July 20, 1952 Meher Baba announced that he would charter "Sufism Reoriented." As Meher Baba explained, through this action he intended to reinvigorate all spiritualities—all "isms"—Sufism in particular, and especially the work begun by Inayat Khan:

> So it is now time for me to re-orient these different isms which end in one God. I intend to make one unique charter regarding this re-oriented Sufism and send it to Ivy Duce from India in November with my signature, and entrust the American Sufism work to her.... [I]t will be applicable to the whole Sufi world—and will, by God's grace—be lasting in its effect and influence.[66]

One of Meher Baba's biographers summarizes the duties Meher Baba dictated in the charter:

> Sufism as reoriented by Meher Baba is based on love and longing for God and the eventual union with God in actual experience. The Charter states that it is the duty of every member: (a) to become conversant with the principles of Sufism by reading and studying the literature of Sufi saints, poets, and authors such as Hafiz, Jalaluddin, Shams, Inayat Khan, Ibn 'Arabi, Shibli, Hujwiri, and others; (b) to necessarily read and study vigorously the Discourses by Meher Baba and the book by Meher Baba called "God Speaks" which depicts the ten states of God and other important truths, and which is his last and final book on this subject; (c) to necessarily repeat verbally daily one name of God for half an hour any time of the day or night; this is to be done consecutively if possible, but may be accomplished in smaller portions if necessary; (d) to meditate on the Master daily for fifteen minutes in any secluded spot.[67]

As a self-proclaimed Avatar of Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad, Meher Baba sometimes referred to himself as the *Qutb al-aqtab*—principal axial saint of all. But Meher Baba's concept of the Avatar was not only a self-reference. In a 1954 gathering with Western disciples he commented: "I know that I am the Avatar in every sense of the word, and that each one of you is an Avatar in one sense or the other." Delving into this universally shared "New Age" sense of Avatarhood, he explained:

> Everything and everyone represents God in one way or another, in some state of consciousness or another, but the God-Man (Avatar, Buddha, Christ, Rasool) represents God in every way, in everything, and everywhere, in one and all states of consciousness, manifest or latent.[68]

One distinctive aspect of Meher Baba's work and life is that for 44 years he maintained absolute silence. "Things that are real are given and received in silence," he said. Feeling that the world had received and ignored so many words from so many teachers for so long, he remained literally silent.

> I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand therefore that I lay down no precepts.
>
> Throughout eternity I have laid down principles and precepts but mankind has ignored them. Man's inability to live God's words makes the Avatar's teaching a mockery. Instead of practicing the compassion He taught, man has waged crusades in His name. Instead of living the humility, purity and truth of His words, man has given way to hatred greed and violence.
>
> Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past, in this present Avataric Form I observe Silence.[69]
>
> You have asked for and been given enough words; it is now time to live them.[70]

Like many New Age teachers to follow, Meher Baba emphasized experience over belief. He taught and communicated, but without speech. In films and photos we can glean what he meant when he explained, "I am eternally

talking.''[71] From July 10, 1925, until October 7, 1954, he pointed to an alphabet board and used hand gestures. From then on he used only gestures.

In a very New Age-sounding pronouncement, Meher Baba declared that he would speak a word of love into every heart that would transform the world:

> When I break my silence it will not be to fill your ears with spiritual lectures. I shall speak only One Word, and this Word will penetrate the hearts of all men and make even the sinner feel that he is meant to be a saint, while the saint will know that God is in the sinner as much as He is in himself.
>
> When I speak that Word, I shall lay the foundation for that which is to take place during the next seven hundred years.[72]

Meher Baba declared that he was engaged in ''universal work.'' He declared that his actions had an impact on all beings which would produce a ''transformation of consciousness'' and bring about a ''New Humanity,'' focused on the oneness of life and even bringing about a cooperative relationship between science and religion. At the least Meher Baba's vision of renewal, optimism, and universal love—plus announcing his intention to inaugurate an awakening which would merge science and religion—parallels the vision of the New Age Movement and those who have embraced, or are anticipating, the unfolding of an Interspiritual Age.

Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (1884–1986)[73]

Discovered in the 1940s emerging from the jungles of Sri Lanka by Tamil Hindus, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen taught disciples as a Hindu until he was recognized by Muslims as a *shaykh* and *wali* (''friend of God''). By 1955 he had laid the foundation for a mosque in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, this pattern was repeated when he came to Philadelphia in 1971. There he was first known as Guru Bawa until he gradually adopted an Islamic framework. Artist and disciple Michael Green describes him as ''the sublime master Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, who was also Guru Bawa, who was the Qutb [axial saint] that came to the West, may this secret be known.''[74]

On August 11, 1976, Bawa inaugurated ablutions and *dhikr* which included parts of the *Salat* prayer until in 1981 he instituted the performance of *Salat.* He gave as the translation of the *Shahada:* ''Nothing else is, only You are, God.''

As photos and films disclose, Bawa was an extremely gentle and graceful man in his manner and speech. Although he looked youthful, legends surrounding him suggested he lived beyond a hundred years. In a practice rarely known among Muslims, he was a vegetarian. From living in the jungle, he had become deeply attuned to nature. His discourses reflected inner

knowledge, more than intellectual knowledge. And although he technically belonged to the lineage of ‘Abdul Qadir al-Gilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood, Bawa’s teachings were more inclusive and eclectic than sectarian. These facets of his teaching made him especially attractive to New-Age devotees and Interspiritually-oriented persons: pacifism, vegetarianism, healthy cooking and eating, nature-mysticism, ecumenism, and his inner or intuitive, rather than text-based knowledge.

Bawa’s prominence in American Sufism has continued since Rumi translator Coleman Barks and Sufi author–illustrator Michael Green have become better known for their work and the role they acknowledge Bawa to have played in inspiring it. Since 1986, Bawa’s tomb (*mazar*) in Coatesville outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has been a pilgrimage site.

Bawa consistently described Islam as unconditional peace and love.

> Everything is Islam. Islam is the spotless purity of the heart, it is a vast ocean. If God’s teaching is there, it is Islam. To act out the qualities of truth and embrace it with true love, that is Islam. The tired hearts, the hurt ones, to embrace them with love, and give them the milk of love, embrace them face to face, heart to heart, in unity, that is Islam.[75]

In *Islam and World Peace* (1987) Bawa describes a radically inclusive vision of Islam as a religion of nonviolence.

> Truth is one and Islam is one. It shows no preference for any particular religion, sect race, or tribe.[76]
>
> We must realize that the human society is one. We are all the children of Adam, and there is only one God and one prayer. The Bible, the Hindu Puranas, the Zend-Avesta, the Torah, and the Qur’an—all these scriptures contain the words of grace given by God to the prophets.[77]

Bawa conveyed the significance of the Prophet Muhammad as a reality within humankind. Gisela Webb describes Bawa’s word play in Tamil:

> . . . *muham* in Tamil means “face” or “countenance” and *aham* means “heart.” Thus Bawa will say, “Muhammad is the beauty of the heart reflected in the face [*muham*]. . .that the Light of Muhammad, the Inner Muhammad, is the first reflection or “countenance” of [*aham*] God’s very being[78]

In Bawa’s view, Allah and the Prophet Muhammad exclusively intended nonviolence:

> Praising Allah and then destroying others is not *jihad*. Some groups wage war against the children of Adam and call it holy war. But for man to raise his sword against man, for man to kill man is not holy war. . . . Allah has no thought of killing or going to war. Why would Allah have sent His prophets if He had such

> thoughts? It was not to destroy men that Muhammad came; he was sent down as the wisdom that could show man how to destroy his own evil.[79]

Bawa emphasizes absolute love and compassion:

> It is compassion that conquers. It is unity that conquers. It is Allah's good qualities, behavior and actions that conquer others. It is this state which is called Islam. The sword doesn't conquer; love is sharper than the sword. Love is an exalted, gentle sword. [80]

Bawa's symbolic correspondences between the five prayers and the five elements (earth, fire, water, air, and ether) resonates with New Age holism. As Michael Green paraphrases and summarizes them: in the dawn prayer (*fajr*) "prayer loosens the earthly torpor...Fajr releases these grasping earth obsessions into the generosity of the dawn."[81] Noon prayer (*salat al-zuhr* tempers the fiery power reflected in the sun's zenith overhead and embodied within as the result of the day's build-up of "anger, arrogance, and impatience." The noon prayer transforms "these wild surging energies into a passionate search for God."[82] The afternoon prayer (*salat al-asr*), marked by the time when the sun casts shadows, carries us into the quality of water. In this watery flux the soul yearns for clarity. The sunset prayer (*salat al-maghrib*) finds the mind given to airiness and needing grounding. At the time of the night prayer (*salat al-isha'*), "solidity falls away, but the spacious quality of ether grows, hypnotizing us with twinkling illusion."[83]

Bawa's teachings about food and cooking also link Islamic and New Age values. He advocated vegetarianism as the real meaning of the practice of *zabih* (*halal*) slaughter of animals. He taught that the purpose of *zabih* was to make slaughter difficult so that people would eat less meat and that ultimately the symbolism of *zabih* means slaughtering the lower ego (*al-nafs al-ammara*).[84]

A final note on Bawa's influence on the New Age Movement is his role in motivating Barks to translate Rumi.

A NOTE ON RUMI AND THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

Rumi, whom Coleman Barks helped raise to fame, has emerged as a bridge between Islam and the New Age Movement, and offers Sufi perspectives that appeal to New Age participants' need for spirituality outside religion. As 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492 CE) once said, Rumi's *Mathnawi* is "the Qur'an in Persian." Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, a Sufi poet and master who lived in Konya, Turkey is widely read and quoted in the New Age Movement. In 1995, according to *Christian Science Monitor, Publisher's Weekly,* and Bill Moyers of PBS, Rumi emerged as "America's best-selling poet." Poets

Robert Bly and Barks had begun public readings and performances of Rumi's poetry in their paraphrased "translations." Barks became a best-selling celebrity and Rumi became an icon for the New Age Movement. Through recited and musical performances, Rumi's poetry also became part of the curriculum of the Men's Movement of the 1980s and 1990s and drew audiences at universities and auditoriums. At the time of this writing, Amazon.com ranked sales of Barks' anthology *The Essential Rumi* as 5,657 among over 600,000 titles. Recently author-illustrator Michael Green has collaborated with The Illumination Band, a group of bluegrass musicians from the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, to release a CD of Rumi's poems set to country-bluegrass music.[85] In his handbill for his lecture series on Sufi poets, Hazrat Inayat Khan wrote this about Rumi's *Masnavi:* "The Masnavi has all the beauty of the Psalms, the music of the hills, the color and scent of roses; but it has more than that, it expresses in song the yearning if the soul to be reunited with God."[86]

CONCLUSION: A "SUN RISES IN THE WEST"—AMERICAN SUFISM AND THE NEW AGE

Here I present conclusions about two questions: (1) What bridges Islam and the Interspiritual Age or New Age Movement? (2) How have the lineages of these four Sufi teachers helped contribute to and develop the New Age Movement and the Interspiritual Age?

(1) New Age Movement participants—both practitioners and consumers—typically affiliate more independently than they could in traditional Islamic cultures where family and community identification tend to regulate religious affiliation. In the course of their lifetimes, New Age participants have typically tried or followed a number of spiritual paths. This is true among many of the followers of the movements we have discussed. And while syncretism and innovation stand at odds with most Muslim rhetoric, they have appeared throughout Islamic history. Inayat Khan's lineage initiated Hindus. All the teachers we discussed studied in multiple traditions.

In spite of their eclecticism and syncretism, each of these movements accepts the *Shahada* or *kalima* as an ultimate statement of truth. What varies is how the *kalima* is interpreted. People in Inayat Khan lineages translate the *Shahada* as "There is no reality other than the One Reality." Bawa translated it as "Nothing else is, only You are, God." Both of these lineages acknowledge Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah. In a more complicated and problematic sense Meher Baba also accepted the *kalima,* (translated as "There is no one greater than God."), modified by the fact that he identified himself as Muhammad. It is no coincidence that teachers from India provide such continuity between Islam and the Interspiritual Age.

Many practitioners and consumers of New-Age Sufism approach only the inner (*batin*) dimensions of Islam. The one exception is the Bawa Muhayyiddeen Fellowship: in 1976, Bawa's followers began performing ablution and reciting *dhikr,* then in 1981 they began to perform *Salat* and continued to adopt the *Shari'a*. As we observed, even though Inayat Khan did not explicitly practice *Shari'a* he expressed it as a "law needed to harmonize with one's surroundings and with one's self within." Furthermore, he went on to say that Qur'an and Hadith warrant that the Shari'a is "meant to be subject to change, in order to suit the time."[87]

Islamic policies on environmentalism will always serve as a potential bridge between Islam and the Interspiritual Age. Ecology and Creation Spirituality will stand as other such bridges. The Qur'an's advocates studying nature's "signs" and manifestations for lessons about divine unity (*tawhid*), and other divine mysteries. Many Sufi teachers presented *tawhid* as a form of *wahdat al-wujud* ("unity of existence"). This correlates roughly with the popular New Age use of "holograms," "wave-particle theory," and the "Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle." But fundamentally, both Sufism, the New Age Movement, and Interspiritual thinkers, correlate science and spirituality as parallel expressions of harmonious unity in creation. Similarly the New Age and Interspiritualist interest in the sacredness of the earth matches that of the Qur'an which frequently presents nature as a book of signs and symbols (Qur'an 16:10–22; 27:64; 30:20–27). Ecology will be a bridge between Islam, the New Age Movement, and the Interspiritual Age.

Does Islam share a doctrine of tolerance with the New Age Movement and the Interspiritual Age? The New Age Movement's theological relativism contradicts most Muslim attitudes toward interreligiosity. Muslims have often embraced tolerance and ecumenism but usually in a context in which Islam is the supreme and final religion. Bawa alone among the teachers we discussed echoes this conservatism. The others taught a spiritual path (*tariqa*) outside of religion. In their time their movements were called by sociologists "New Religious Movements." In Wayne Teasdale's exemplification of Interspirituality there is at least a precedent for setting one's own religion as the single framework for inclusivity.

Many contemporary Sufis who practice meditation use a kind of *chakra* system, and practice theosophy (*ishraqiyya*). They may also provide a bridge between Islam and the New Age Movement. Sufism offers a teaching about the energy centers (*lata'if*) of the subtle body.[88] Technically, however, the system of centers differs from yogic and New Age *chakras*. Sufism shares with Transpersonal Psychology a recognition of extraordinary abilities. As in the New Age, Sufi saints are sought for spiritual healing. Most New Age Movement participants would be attracted to the Healing Concentration of the Sufi Order and Bawa's philosophy of farming, cooking, and eating.

(2) The four teachers discussed in this chapter are Islamic heralds of the New Age Movement and the Interspiritual Age. Since each stands on

an isthmus between his Islamic background and the Interspiritual Age, his life demonstrates how Muslims and non-Muslims might relate Islam and the Interspritual Age. Hazrat Inayat Khan, Samuel Lewis, and Meher Baba knew Islam intimately but did not follow the *Shari'a* based on the Five Pillars of Islam. Members of the Inayat Khan traditions meditate, practice *waza'if* (meditation on divine qualities), recite *dhikr,* and do Dances of Universal Peace. Meher Baba led *Salat* once as part of an Inter-Faith Prayer meeting in September 1954.[89] "Baba lovers" encounter Islam as part of Meher Baba's teaching and culture. Only for Sufism Reoriented's members did he prescribe the practice of reciting the Islamic Names of God. Still, these three teachers used Sufi literature extensively, especially Persian poets.

Bawa placed Qur'an and Hadith at the center of his discourses. Bawa alone established the conventional practice of *Shari'a* including and especially, *Salat.* Bawa's *dhikr* included traditional *salawat an-nabi* (recitations of blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad) and invocations to the head *pir* of Bawa's *qadiri* lineage, 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani.[90] Bawa alone considered worship of Hindu deities incorrect and expressed concern over the proliferation of false teachers in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Inayat Khan and teachers in his lineage have consciously incorporated Hindu, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Christian elements—more than one finds in most Islamic *tariqas.* The "Dances of Universal Peace," meetings, publications, and workshops all show an inclusive and "integral" approach to synthesizing ideas and practices across religious boundaries. Each of these teachers has in his own way invented an American Sufism that continues to contribute to and reflect the New Age Movement.

By introducing a new genre of worship, the "Dances of Universal Peace," Lewis was a herald of the New Age Movement. Inspired by Sufi *dhikr,* he created an American *dhikr* that also incorporated Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Native American, and Goddess Worship songs. As Lewis wrote in 1970, "My friends, it is a New Age." As "spiritual teacher to the hippies," he was a founder of the New Age Movement.

Bawa's teachings offer a bridge between Islam and the Interspiritual Age, especially as outlined in his book on world peace and Barks' and Green's book on the *Salat* prayer. This is the only book on *Salat* I have ever seen featuring illustrations from Buddhist, Christian, and other traditions to describe, interpret, and give instruction in the Muslim prayer. Bawa's presentation of Islam as a religion of peace and nonviolence makes Islam more accessible and harmonious with the Interspritual Age. As a vegetarian who taught farming and cooking, Bawa was in harmony with the health-food movement. His yogic life-style, gentleness and charisma, were appreciated by people with New Age tastes in teachers.

In an era when many Muslims and Jews have struggled with their collective relationship in the world, it is instructive and encouraging that Pir Vilayat had

a deep spiritual friendship and teaching relationship with the Hasidic Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi of the Havera (''friendship'') movement. Both Pir Vilayat and Murshid Sam had deep relationships with the Rabbi and singer Schlomo Carlbach. It is also interesting that many members of the Sufi Order, the Ruhaniat, the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, and many other American Sufi Orders have come from Jewish backgrounds—so much so that some people describe them as ''Jew-fis.''[91] This in itself is a force for bringing about an Interspiritual Age. The following appreciation of Murshid Sam by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi illustrates the potential for these movements to offer healing influences:

> Although the sages have said that since the destruction of the Temple, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the children and fools, the door to prophecy has remained open to those who were prepared to be God-fools in a child-like fashion. Murshid S.A.M. entered that door by his ''foolish'' faith, his child-like simplicity and has drawn from Revelation life giving elixirs to sustain us through the chaos we must pass in order to enter the New Age. [92]

In short, the New Age Movement and Islam have intersected whenever Sufism has been introduced to the Euro-American baby-boomer, hippie, and yuppie generations. Most of these Sufis who hold New Age and Interspiritual values and ideals are well into their 30s, 40s, and beyond. Although many young people followed Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, Murshid Sam, and Meher Baba in the 1960s as well as Bawa Muhayyiddeen, in recent decades newly entering community members have tended to be older.

If we have entered a New Age, an Interspiritual Age, or a second Axial Age, then its ideals of kindness, nonviolence, and ''interspirituality'' are clearly reflected in the lives and work of Inayat Khan, Lewis, Meher Baba and Bawa. These four teachers built a bridge between Islam and the Interspiritual Age and encouraged people of many backgrounds to venture across it.

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2. *Mesbah al-hedayah,* Nurbakhsh, *Traditions of the Prophet,* 80; Nurbakhsh, vol. 2, 28.

3. Divan ST XXXI, in *Selected Poems of Rumi,* ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2000).

4. Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart* (Novato, California: New World Library, 1999, 2001), 5.

5. Russill Paul, *The Yoga of Sound* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2003), 36; Karen Armstrong, "A New Axial Age," *What is Enlightenment* 31 (Dec. 2005–Feb. 2006): 34–36.

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9. Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart.*

10. Armstrong, "A New Axial Age," 35–36.

11. Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* (New York: Penguin, 2000) 10.

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14. Omid Safi, "The Sufi Path of Love in Iran and India," in *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music, and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan,* ed. Pirzade Zia Inayat Khan (New Lebanon, New York: Omega Publications, 2001), 265.

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20. Inayat Khan, *A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty.*

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22. Inayat Khan, *The Unity of Religious Ideals,* 199.

23. Ibid., 200.

24. Ibid., 199.

25. Donald A. Sharif Graham. "Spreading the Wisdom of Sufism: The Career of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan in the West," in *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music, and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan,* ed. Pirzade Zia Inayat Khan (New Lebanon, N.Y.: Omega Publications, 2001), 144, n. 33.

26. Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d. 283/896),* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

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28. Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1997), 550.

29. Shams Kairys, "Invincible Spirit: Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan," *Elixir* 1 (Autumn 2005): 33.

30. Ibid., 33.

31. Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, *Awakening: A Sufi Experience* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher Putnam, 1999), 67.

32. Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters,* 543–553.

33. Ibid.

34. Kairys, *Elixir,* 37.

35. Ibid., 175.

36. Ibid., 90.

37. Ibid., 16–17.

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39. Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters,* 569.

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57. Meher Baba, *God Speaks,* 2 ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973), xxxvi.

58. Meher Baba, in *Silent Master, Meher Baba,* ed. Irwin Luck (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Irwin Luck, 1967), 15.

59. Ibid., 22–23.

60. Charles Haynes, *Meher Baba: The Awakener* (North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: The Avatar Foundation, 1993), 22.

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63. Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing,* (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Foundation, 1995), 24–25.

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66. Meher Baba, in *The Beloved: The Life and Work of Meher Baba,* ed. Naosherwan Anzar (North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1974,1983), 66.

67. Ibid.

68. Luck, *Silent Master, Meher Baba,* 16.

69. Haynes, *Meher Baba,* 65–66.

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71. Meher Baba quoted in Purdom, 5.

72. Charles Haynes, *Meher Baba: The Awakener* (North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, 1993), 111.

73. The claims of Bawa's birth year are advanced by Sharon Marcus in her Introduction to Bawa's book *The Triple Flame: The Inner Secrets of Sufism* (Philadelphia Press, 2001) as reported in Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, ''Are We Up To The Challenge? The Need for a Radical Reordering of the Islamic Discourse on Women,'' in *Progressive Muslims: on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism,* ed. Omid Safi (Oxford, U.K.: One World, 2003), 245, n. 14. I have also personally heard claims of Bawa's longevity from many of his students.

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79. Muhaiyaddeen, *Islam and World Peace,* 51.

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81. Barks and Green, *The Illuminated Prayer,* 48.

82. Ibid., 50.

83. Ibid., 52, 54, 56.

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9

I and Thou in a Fluid World: Beyond "Islam versus the West"

Omid Safi

Another world is possible.

We as God's children are not bound to live in fear and poverty, humiliation and rage. Other paths are possible, and they must be sought. The path to there has to start here, with each and every one of us. There is a time for peace, a time for dignity, and a time for self-determination. And that time is now.

We are perpetually surrounded by clichés of "clash of civilizations," "Islam versus the West," and so on. We insist that it is part of our task to rise up to an acknowledgement of a fluid, hybrid world in which nationality and ethnicity, religion and race, sexuality and gender, class and political commitment each frame one facet of larger, broader, more cosmopolitan identities. Neither religion nor nationalism will be accepted as a monolith that somehow exhausts one's identity. In the words of Edward W. Said, in the aftermath of colonialism, all identities are hybrid, fluid, and overlapping: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, hetereogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic."[1]

The aim of this chapter is to conceive of an American Muslim identity in a way that allows for such a hetereogenous and differentiated acknowledgment of the multiple layers of our identities. However, before doing so it is mandatory to visit, challenge, critique, and deconstruct the powerful and seductive paradigm of "Islam versus the West" (and the twin "clash of civilizations") before we can offer a more holistic alternative. To do so, we will first deal with Muslim Westernophobes and then with Western Islamophobes.

MOVING BEYOND MUSLIM WESTERNOPHOBIA

One of the tasks of Muslims committed to the highest mandates of ethical responsibility before God is to engage the voices and actions of Muslims who have declared a war on other Muslims as well as Westerners—governments

and civilians alike. Many such expressions take place in the context of responses to Western colonialism and imperialism.[2] Whereas critiques of Western imperialism and colonialism are a time-honored and proud tradition of all anticolonial and postcolonial movements,[3] most of these movements have not historically redirected the violence of colonialism back against the civilians of Euro-American civilization, as well as engaging in guerilla tactics against fellow Muslims, as we see in the case of current Iraq. Yet these hideous practices are precisely the case for Al Qaeda today.

The piece of propaganda issued by the self-proclaimed ''World Islamic Front,'' masquerading as an Islamic legal opinion (*fatwa*) and signed by Usama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, reads in part:

> . . . In compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Mosque [Mecca] from their grip. . . .[4]

This ''fatwa,'' which appeared in the Arabic journal *al-Quds,* presented this duty as a ''religious obligation'' (*fard*) upon all Muslims.[5] Subsequent interviews with Bin Laden make it clear that he viewed the 9/11 attacks as targeted against the symbols of American military and economic structures. He justified the attacks as a form of ''defensive jihad,'' and time and again came back to the notion that ''the Jewish lobby has taken America and the West hostage.''[6] Usama Bin Laden also dismissed out of hand the views of Muslim jurists who have challenged the jihad justification as ''having no value.'' Other Al Qaeda members such as Sulaiman Abu Ghaith have also decried the ''Crusader-Zionist'' conspiracy, comprised of Bush, Blair, and Israel.[7]

The task of contemporary Muslims in confronting this perspective is quite complicated. We begin by a critical discussion of the spectrum of interpretations of jihad in Islamic history, and by making the case that no such attack against civilians can be justified under Islamic law. Yet ours is not a mere theoretical conversation, but one that seeks to transform societies as well. So we also seek to engage those in Muslim societies who gravitate toward such messages by calling them to the higher ground of pluralism and justice. Lastly, while questioning the usefulness of the ''Crusader-Zionist'' conspiracy as a totalizing explanation, we also have a responsibility to call Americans to envision a relationship with the Middle East which is not based on the unilateral support of Israel regardless of the latter's actions. We will have to insist that both Palestinians and Israelis observe international human rights regulations, and in cases where either is guilty of breaking these laws, to help in bringing them to justice and establishing alternatives on the ground. In the case of Israel, that means forming broad coalitions with

Jewish peace groups who wish to live side by side with their Arab neighbors in a peace rooted in justice.[8] It also means to admit at the most humane level the legitimate right of Israeli mothers and fathers to be able to send their children to schools or cafes without worrying about them being blown to pieces by Palestinian suicide-bombers. In the case of Palestinians, it means working with Palestinians to take a page from Gandhi, and express their legitimate resistance through nonviolent means, while bringing the world's conscience to focus on their plight.[9] It also means to admit at the most humane level that Palestinian children have the right to live in dignity and not to be mocked or shot at by the IDF (Israel Defence Force), and that Palestinian families have the right to live in their homes in peace and not have them bulldozed by the Israeli military. This is a long and daunting task, but we perceive of ourselves as bridge-makers whose task and calling it is to bring together the silent majority of humanity who wish to live in peace and harmony with one another. The Muslim extremists' hatred of the West is far too commonly known for me to devote more space to its discussion here. I will now move to its far less discussed mirror image, Western Islamophobia.[10]

MOVING BEYOND WESTERN ISLAMOPHOBIA

Contemporary Muslims in the West also have a task to critique Western Islamophobes in academia and policy circles, and to provide alternate models. With the ascent of the Neo-Conservative movement, it is hard to overemphasize the power this Islamophobic perspective currently has in America.[11] One of the gravest tasks of Western Muslims is to expose the ideological background of many "Islam versus West" proponents who are positioned in the highest places of power in the United States, and to offer viable alternatives. We will begin here by reviewing two of the most noted—and notorious—voices of Islamophobia in the West, Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington.

Bernard Lewis

Bernard Lewis is simultaneously one of the most celebrated and most vilified scholars of Islam and Middle Eastern Studies in the West. His scholarly life covers over 65 years, extending from 1938 to the present. He is frequently acknowledged, however disputed this claim might be, as "the foremost Western scholar of Islam." At the time of the writing of this chapter, two of the current four best selling books on Islam (*What Went Wrong* and *The Crisis of Islam*) were composed by Lewis.

Lewis is perhaps the best known example of scholars who have fine-tuned a textual and philological approach to the study of Muslim societies. He has also been criticized as the epitome of an "Orientalist" mode of scholarship.

It was precisely this accusation that informed so much of Said's paradigm-shifting study *Orientalism*.[12] In the years following the publication of *Orientalism,* Said and Lewis exchanged vitriolic personal attacks in the pages of *New York Review of Books*.[13] My concern here is not to undertake yet another personal attack on Bernard Lewis. Nor is it my intention to begin by calling attention to Lewis' involvement in right-wing politics and pro-Zionist groups. One cannot entirely avoid that topic in a thorough engagement with Lewis, because Lewis himself does not avoid it (especially in his TV appearances). However, I will begin by exploring his assessment of Islam, Muslims, and modernity.

Lewis' focus on Islam is bound up exclusively in the Middle East. In fact, in many of his works he uses the phrases "Muslims" and "Middle Easterners" interchangeably, as if all Muslims are Middle Easterners, and all Middle Easterners Muslims. This confusion even shows up in the titles of Lewis' works.[14] For a scholar of his rank, he seems unaware or unconcerned with the fact that over half of all Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan. In reality, Muslims are more South Asian than Arab, more Southeast Asian than Middle Eastern. The Muslim populations of Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan easily dwarf the entire population of the Middle East. However, Lewis' focus on the Middle East is entirely consistent with the Arab-centric view of Orientalist scholars whose approach to Islam is primarily mediated through the study of Arabic (and to a far lesser extent, Persian) texts. In fact, so much of Lewis' concerns with Islam and Muslims begin and end with the broader Eastern Mediterranean in general, and Palestine/Israel more particularly.

Lewis' voluminous and prominent publications extend back to the year 1950. As John Trumpbour reminds us, Lewis had used the idea of a clash among civilizations as far back as 1964.[15] However, the most recent phase of his public polemic against Muslims dates back to four decades later, to a 1990 article in *The Atlantic Monthly,* titled "The Roots of Muslim Rage."[16] The subtitle of this piece was even more specific: "Why so many Muslims deeply resent the West, and why their bitterness will not easily be mollified." The essay starts in the same way that many of Lewis' works do, with an acknowledgement that "Islam is one of the world's great religions." Whenever this phrase appears in Lewis' book, it is followed by a brief paragraph praising the achievements of premodern Muslims in scientific areas and in creating a culture of tolerance. Lewis oftentimes compares this medieval achievement with what he identifies as the more inferior medieval situation of Christendom. Almost without fail, the praising of premodern Muslims serves as a foil against which Lewis posits the alleged backwardness and failure of modern Muslims. The rest of the "Muslim rage" essay is a long and totalizing diatribe against modern Muslims. The first significant idea that Lewis introduces without any supporting evidence is the notion that Muslims harbor hatred for the West not for any particular action of the West—specifically

not for colonialism, or for U.S. support of corrupt and dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world. Rather, Lewis posits that Muslims hate the West simply because it is the West, and represents Western ideals:

> At times this hatred goes beyond hostility to specific interests or actions or policies or even countries and becomes *a rejection of Western civilization as such, not only what it does but what it is*, and the principles and values that it practices and professes. These are indeed seen as innately evil, and those who promote or accept them as the "enemies of God."[17] [emphasis added]

This notion of "they hate us because we are Western civilization" has proven surprisingly resilient. It is echoed, as we shall see, by Samuel Huntington in his "Clash of Civilizations" theory. In the days following September 11, 2001, even the usually astute Colin Powell stated that the attacks on New York City and Washington were "attacks on civilization,"[18] as if the members of Al Qaeda simply represented a vacuum of civilization, as opposed to a violent movement with a vastly different set of values. To attribute the reason for hatred to another group is of course not a task to be undertaken haphazardly, and can only be undertaken through engaging—even if ultimately dismissing—the rationale provided by one's opponents. Lewis does neither in this case, simply deciphering the motivations of the unspeaking and unnamed (and thus unable to resist and challenge) *Other*.

There is a good bit of scholarly debate regarding the very issue of whether or not it is proper to speak of a single Western civilization, rather than a plurality of strands of history and schools of thought. Even if we grant the existence of a singular Western civilization, one has to be willing to specify exactly what Western civilization is thought to stand for. If we assume that it stands, among other things, for freedom, democracy, individual rights, and so on, then it is a legitimate question to ask why anyone (that is, Muslims) would hate freedom or democracy? The argument of "they hate us for what we are, not what we do" is ultimately a convenient exercise in allowing the "us" to construct an enemy, attribute a motivation to "them," and ultimately to demonize them. However, it does not allow the audience to move any closer to understanding the real objectives that any adversary might have with our specific policies. Even when we are likely to disagree with those gripes and critiques, it behooves us to understand more clearly the perceptions and motivations of an oppositional group.

A more fundamental critique is the positing and positioning of Muslims as an "other," an oppositional group. But I will come back to this notion in a concluding remark on pluralism in the North American scene. Lewis then presents the "struggle between these rival systems"—which he identifies as Islam and Christendom—and traces this rivalry back to the very foundation of Islam: "It began with the advent of Islam, in the seventh century, and has continued virtually to the present day." Islam is Islam, and Christendom

is Christendom, and never the twain shall meet, so Lewis would have one believe. One would be well advised to ask whether it is proper to speak of a distinct, crystallized identity for Europe (a term that Lewis takes as identical with Christendom) in the seventh century, as opposed to particular entities such as the Byzantine empire, and so on. Also, Lewis' depiction of the relationship between the Islamic and Christian civilizations consists of "long series of attacks and counterattacks, jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquests." This model of focusing on clashes is again appropriated by Huntington and others. What is missing from this picture is the entire range of intellectual collaborations, intermarriage, trade, diplomatic exchanges, indeed peaceful coexistence between the two civilizations. In Lewis' assessment, places like Cordoba where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived side by side in peace, and engaged the deepest aspects of each others' traditions simply do not register.

In subsequent sections of this essay, Lewis summarily brings up various reasons for potential anti-Americanism among Muslims today: U.S. support for Israel, American support for "hated regimes," and colonialism. He quickly moves to dismiss the relevance of all these factors as ultimate explanations, through phrases such as "This accusation has some plausibility.... But it does not suffice." The very wording of these reasons as "accusations" betrays Lewis' own positioning. In place of an examination of these ideas, Lewis moves into what he identifies as "something deeper that turns every disagreement into a problem and makes every problem insoluble." This "deeper" problem is none other than "Muslim rage." The very language of "rage" as a psychological profile of over a quarter of the world's population is a sad reminder of earlier nineteenth-century discussions of "the savage mind," "the Negro mind," and so on. While the limitations, indeed absurdity, of those terms are now fully recognized, Lewis still feels entitled to use terms like "Muslim rage." In doing so, he places himself in the nineteenth-century racist Euro-colonial discourse.

It is later in this essay that Lewis introduces the problematic phrase "a clash of civilizations," which Huntington would later borrow. Lewis starts out in a fairly conventional manner diagnosing the ills of Muslim society through identifying what is "lacking" from Islam. In identifying the importance of secularism, Lewis states: "Muslims experienced no such need and evolved no such doctrine." Said, among others, has pointed out the problematic of explaining Muslim events through what is *not* there.[19] Lewis' approach is as helpful in identifying the course of action that is Islamic history as describing an orange by stating that it is not an elephant. Lewis, while not a psychologist —and quite averse to anthropology—does not hesitate to offer a psychological model which seems to detect something quite perverse in the most ordinary of Muslims. Even when Muslims display kindness and generosity, these emotions are seen by Lewis as potentially masking a deeper, more underlying hatred and violence. Of course no proof can be offered for this,

apart from Lewis' own authority. Yet again unnamed, unspeaking, and unexaminable subjects are evoked to observe the following: "There is something in the religious culture of Islam, which inspired, in even the humblest peasant or peddler, a dignity and a courtesy toward others never exceeded and rarely equaled in other civilizations." In typical Lewis fashion, this compliment must be followed with a brutal insult:

> And yet, in moments of upheaval and distortion, when the deeper passions are stirred, this dignity and courtesy toward others can give way to an explosive mixture of rage and hatred which impels even the government of an ancient and civilized country—even the spokesman of a great spiritual and ethical religion—to espouse kidnapping and assassination, and try to find, in the life of their Prophet, approval and indeed precedent for such actions.[20]

The last item that needs to be noted in Lewis' essay is his assessment of the responsibility of the West in ameliorating the "clash of civilizations." According to Lewis, there must be a "hard struggle" within Islam between fundamentalism and a more tolerant version of Islam (which Lewis is not quite sure what to call). And what is to be the role of the West in this struggle? Significantly, nothing. "We of the West can do little or nothing. Even the attempt might do harm, for these are issues that Muslims must decide among themselves." To sum up Lewis' worldview, the U.S. support for Israel and other oppressive regimes in the Middle East are overblown excuses, colonialism is not really an explanation of the political resentment of Muslims against the West, and finally, there is nothing that the West can do to help. The fault and the responsibility rest solely with Muslims.

Muslims can do no more than partially agree with Lewis, even as they part ways with him in a profound fashion. Clearly, we as Muslims have a responsibility to ensure justice and pluralism within our own communities. To that extent, we as Muslims have a responsibility to be "witnesses for truth, even if it means to speak against" our own selves and our community—as the Qur'an reminds us.[21] However, Muslims also insist that the responsibility to urge humanity toward an age of pluralism rests not just on the shoulders of Muslims, but on all of humanity. As the most politically and militarily hegemonic civilization that the world has ever known, the West is not exempt from this responsibility. Contrary to Lewis, there are things that those of us in the West—particularly in the United States—can and need to do in order to bring about a day where justice and freedom are guaranteed for all.

Lewis has pursued the same theses more recently, but with greater ferocity. All that seems to have changed is that he is now afforded an even more visible public platform. His *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* concludes with a section in which he describes the Muslim encounter with modernity using clichés such as "badly wrong," "poor," "weak," "ignorant," "disappointing," "humiliating," "corrupt," "impoverished,"

''weary,'' ''capricious,'' ''shabby,'' ''dictatorships,'' repression,'' and ''indoctrination.'' All of the above descriptions are simply from one page (p. 151) of *What Went Wrong*. This barrage of totalizing insults comes unnamed and unchecked and is directed at any and all Middle Easterners/ Muslims. In the subsequent pages, Lewis is even more direct than he was in ''Roots of Muslim Rage.'' Whereas the Muslim resistance to Western imperialism had been an ''accusation'' before, in *What Went Wrong* it is now a ''scapegoat.'' Furthermore, Anglo-French rule and American influence are posited as a benign ''consequence, not a cause'' of ''the inner weakness of Middle Eastern states and societies.''[22]

The brutal oppression of Palestinians in the past century, the forcible exile of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland, the ongoing illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, all of these are handled by Lewis as part of his narrative on ''anti-Semitism.''[23] The Palestinian peoples, if they exist at all for Lewis, are only the subjects of hatred for Jews, not even capable of experiencing loss and lament. It is hard indeed to read Lewis' diatribe against modern Arabs and Muslims as being entirely separate from his profound Zionism. His description of the state of Israel, with one of the most potent armies in the world according to the IDF itself[24], armed with over 220 nuclear warheads (in violation of U.N. resolutions[25]), as ''surrounded, outnumbered, and outgunned by neighbors''[26] seems either out of touch with reality or deliberately misleading. Lewis' dismissal of modern Arabs (and indeed Muslims) is intrinsically tied to his insistence that Arabs accept not the right to existence of the State of Israel (which Arab governments have affirmed on a number of occasions), but rather the very brutal system of occupation of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As Said remarked in 1978, Lewis' project is to explain why the ''Muslims (or Arabs) still will not settle down and accept Israeli hegemony over the Near East.''[27]

The very last paragraph of *What Went Wrong* starts with this sentence: ''If the peoples of the Middle East continue on their present path, the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole region. . . .''[28] In reading Lewis' verdict, one cannot help but wonder if at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it would be acceptable for a noted public figure such as Lewis to describe any other group of humanity apart from Middle Easterners *as a whole* as being represented by the suicide bomber. One can only imagine the outrage that would be felt and heard from many corners if instead of talking about Middle Easterners (read: Muslims), a public scholar of Lewis' rank had described all Chinese, all Africans, all women, all Jews, or all Hindus in such a derogatory fashion. Nonetheless, this characterization is perfectly consistent with Lewis' trajectory from his earlier scholarship. Absolving the West of all guilt and the responsibility to help, Lewis concludes by putting the fault and the responsibility for fixing ''what has gone wrong'' entirely on the Muslims: ''For the time being, the choice is their own.''[29]

Samuel Huntington

Whereas Lewis casts a long and dark shadow over the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, Huntington is even more implicated in policy circles. As the past president of the American Political Science Association, and a University Professor at Harvard, Huntington is a figure whose political theories deserve a serious engagement. It would be hard to overestimate the level of influence that he and his ideas have had on public policy circles and successive administrations. The perspective of Huntington carries a great deal of weight with many Neo-conservatives in George W. Bush's administration, such as Paul Wolfowitz, Condoleezza Rice, and so on.

Huntington published his widely read and highly influential essay titled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the 1993 edition of *Foreign Affairs*. It is important to review and critique this much-discussed thesis. According to Huntington, the primary source of conflict in the emerging world order was to be not ideological or economic, but rather cultural. He further identified the various civilizations that were to be the agents of this process:

> Civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilization.[30]

There are at least two points worth noting from this list: first, some civilizations are identified based on religious identity (Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox), whereas others are based on geographical location (Japanese, Western, Latin America, African). It is not clear from Huntington's list why some—but not all—civilizations are identified based on religion, a feature that he identifies as the most important differentiator of civilizations. Many critics have pointed to the profound racism of this schema, which seems deeply uncertain as to whether or not Africans deserve to be named as having their own civilization: "and possibly, African."[31] This revelation of Huntington's underlying racism was quickly covered up in the 1996 book version, where Sub-Saharan Africa was listed as African civilization, without any qualifiers. Between 1993 and 1996, he seems to have recognized the inappropriateness of describing all Chinese as "Confucian," and renamed that civilization as "Sinic." Likewise, for him, Buddhists had emerged as their own civilization between 1993 and 1996.

In discussing the interaction among these civilizations, Huntington relies on a favorite metaphor, to which he returns time and again: "fault lines."[32] The language of "fault lines" comes from geology, where the tectonic plates on the Earth's crust shift ever so slowly, inching along till they bump into each other, causing earthquakes. He applies the same concept to civilizational units: "The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the

future."[33] The choice of the metaphor is particularly intriguing, as it reveals Huntington's conception of civilizations as rock-solid, distinct entities that go bump in the night—causing a clash of civilizations. What is so intriguing about this depiction is that it bears almost no resemblance to the way that people who study cultures and civilizations—sociologists and anthropologists—often talk about these entities. Anthropologists in particular are mindful of the fluidity of civilizations, and are particularly aware of the adaptability of each culture. Huntington's work bears almost no indication of having engaged that whole body of scholarship.

By the publication of the book bearing the title *Clash of Civilizations,*[34] Huntington attempted to tease out some of the assertions in the earlier article. For example, he offered a flowchart in which he traced the development of what is termed "Eastern Hemisphere civilizations." What is termed "Classical (Mediterranean)" civilization is said to give rise to both the Islamic and the Western civilizations (both of which also receive input from the "Canaanite" civilization), as well as the Orthodox (Russian) civilization.[35] What is missing from this crude evolutionary schema is any sense of interaction *among* civilizations. There is no sense of how Islamic civilization may have interacted with, contributed to, and learned from Western civilization.[36] The chapter which is supposed to deal with "intercivilizational issues" engages only weapons transfer and an obsession with immigration, without any possibility of intellectual, aesthetic, or other mutually beneficial cultural exchanges.[37] For Huntington, the primary mode of interaction among civilizations is one of conflict and clash. He states:

> The civilizational "us" and the extracivilizational "them" is a constant in human history. These differences in intra- and extracivilizational behavior stem from:
>
> 1. feeling of superiority (and occasionally inferiority) toward people who are perceived as being very different
> 2. fear of and lack of trust in such people;
> 3. difficulty of communication with them as a result of differences in language and what is considered civil behavior;
> 4. lack of familiarity with the assumptions, motivations, social relationships, and social practices of other people.[38]

But is this historically what has happened throughout human history? What is one to do with the transmission of Greek philosophy to the Western world through Muslim commentators? What about places like Andalusia, where Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious communities lived side by side in peace, while their scholars engaged one another in pluralistic academies?[39] One could point to countless other examples. While there have of course been many situations of superiority/inferiority complex exasperated by conflict, it also is the case that many civilizations have sought to study one

another and have strived for a pluralistic coexistence. These ''non-clash'' situations and possibilities do not register for Huntington.

Huntington, following Lewis, has a problematic relationship with Islam. The main problem from Huntington's perspective is not Al Qaeda, the Taliban, or the Wahhabis, not that ever present bogey-man of ''Islamic fundamentalism,'' ''Muslim terrorism,'' and so on. The problem for Huntington, simply, is *Islam* itself, the entire religious tradition, the full spectrum of interpretations, practices, and so on. He states:

> The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.[40]

In Huntington's formulations we also have the classic markers of difference, ''a different civilization,'' with the typical superiority/inferiority association. Taking his cues from Lewis' assertion that the Muslims hate ''us'' (that is, the West) not for what the West does but simply for what it is, Huntington goes on to assert:

> The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world.[41]

In the 1993 article Huntington had made the infamous assertion that ''Islam has bloody borders.''[42] While that statement was criticized heavily, it did not prevent Huntington from expanding upon it in the book version:

> In all these places [Palestine, Lebanon, Ethiopia, bulge of Africa, Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Kenya, Tanzania], the relations between Muslims and peoples of other civilizations—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Hindu, Chinese, Buddhist, Jewish—have been generally antagonistic; most of these relations have been violent at some point in the past; many have been violent in the 1990s. Wherever one looks along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living peacefully with their neighbors.[43]

This assertion is a serious one and obviously is tied to a reading of Islam and Muslims as being essentially incapable of living in peace with those different from them. The most substantial and thorough factual critique of this assertion by Huntington is that offered by the Harvard historian Roy Mottahedeh. Mottahedeh, a leading Middle East historian, rightly points out that Huntington selectively picks the historical episodes that fit his model, while neglecting parallel examples that would undermine his argument.[44]

Huntington's thesis is predicated on a number of assumptions about authentic American identity being white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. While his misgivings about Islam betray part of this racial/racist anxiety, it is his more recent writings that have made this point painfully clear. Case in point is his 2004 article called "The Hispanic Challenge."[45] The summary for this article reads:

> The persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. Unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril.

Even more troubling is the conclusion of the essay, in which Huntington even seeks to deny Mexican-Americans the right to dream in their mother tongue if they wish to be participants in the American dream: "There is no Americano dream. There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English." Nowhere in Huntington's worldview, not about Muslims and not about Hispanics, is there an awareness of culture in the way that anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of religion discuss: the notion of overlapping, fluid spheres of identity. Possibilities of bilingualism and multiculturalism are indeed anathema to the Huntingtons of the world.

One can criticize Islamophobes such as Lewis and Huntington, and indeed both deserve serious engagements. Yet the measuring stick of the ethical demands of Islam is the amount of change Muslims can produce in lived communities, urging all of us toward ever-higher ideals of justice and pluralism. In doing so, one has to acknowledge the fundamental challenges that the American Muslim community faces.

CHALLENGES TO NORTH AMERICAN ISLAM

Participation and Representation in the Media and Cultural Productions

American Muslims form the fastest growing block of citizens in the United States. In 1970, there were a scant 100,000 Muslims in America. By 2006, accurate estimates put the number at more than six million. This 60-fold growth in slightly over 30 years represents a phenomenal achievement. It is due to both the immigration of Muslims from South Asia and the Arab world to the United States and the mass conversion of many Americans (largely African Americans) to Islam. Yet when one compares American Muslims with

other religious groups with similarly large populations, there is a noticeable gap. The most frequent comparison, one filled with admiration and envy, is with the American Jewish population. Comparisons by Muslims with American Jewry are filled with admiration for their political clout, envy for their civic institutions, outrage at the support of U.S. government for Israel, and hope for achieving exactly the same level of prominence. Being weary of charges of anti-Semitism (and not always innocent of them), these comparisons with the Jewish community are usually voiced inside the Muslim community.

By now, many scholars of religion such as Diana Eck have noted that numbering at six million, there are as many American Muslims as American Jews, more Muslims than Episcopalians, and more Muslims than Presbyterians.[46] There is no shortage of Muslims on TV, but most portrayals are in the context of either terrorism or political leaders of other countries. Both of these reinforce the erroneous impression of Muslims as quintessentially ''other,'' fundamentally different from ''us'' Americans.[47] One is hard-pressed to think of a single Muslim intellectual, artist, or musician who is nationally known at the level of ABC, CNN, NBC, or CBS. (Fox ''News'' is beyond hope.) The only American Muslims that most Americans would be able to name come from the realm of sports: Muhammad Ali, Hakeem Olajuwon, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and so on. There are no high-profile Muslim journalists (apart from the half-Iranian Christiane Amanpour who does not self-identify as a Muslim) on these TV shows. In short, American Muslims are in the society but have almost no representation in terms of popular culture aside from negative stereotypes.

When there are Muslims who show up on TV, they show up as ''obviously Muslim,'' with a singularly religious identity that does not reflect the multiple and fractured identities of most Muslims today. The women almost invariably wear a conservative type of *hijab,* and the males are typically conservative, immigrant, bearded, and speak with an accent. Going back to the analogy with Judaism, it would be similar to having only Ultra-Orthodox Jews on TV, rather than a full spectrum that would cover everything from Orthodox to Conservative and Reformed. That great marker of humanity, humor, is uniformly lacking from Muslim subjects on TV. Muslims on TV experience grief or outrage, but almost never joy or laughter. Also absent from media depictions are the delicious wit and affectionate sarcasm for which so many Muslim cultures are known. When we laugh not at someone but with them, we have experienced their full humanity. The humanity of American Muslims will be acknowledged only when we come up with our own successful and widely distributed version of Adam Sandler's ''Chanukah Song''! That project and others similar to it will have to take place alongside the daily struggle to achieve social justice, gender equality, and so on. Yet it would be foolish to underestimate the interconnectedness of issues of culture and politics, as Said and others have reminded us.

Political Participation

It is one of the great ironies of American political life that some 72 percent of American Muslims voted for George W. Bush in the 2000 elections,[48] only to see the Bush regime impose the most severe erosion of civil liberties in the last 40 years and initiate a hostile and potentially unending "war on terrorism" almost exclusively on Muslim populations all over the world. The assault on civil liberties, which affected Muslims in America more directly than other Americans, began with the so-called PATRIOT Act, passed hastily and without any opposition after the 9/11 attack.[49] Even more terrifying attempts to erode civil liberties are underway in the so-called "PATRIOT 2" Bill.[50]

Muslims have underdeveloped infrastructures of participation in American politics. It is fair to say that no other group with over six million members in American society is so politically fragmented and ill-organized.[51] While one is beginning to see the formative stages of development of Muslim Public Affairs Committee groups, there are still a number of substantial challenges ahead. The first is overcoming the divide between immigrant and African American communities. It remains to be seen how much unity can be forged between the immigrant Muslim population in America and the African American Muslim population. There are profound class divisions between the two, which often dictate communal, social, and political participation.[52] The second challenge is that of investing in American political structures: this is a particular problem for immigrant Muslims. Many came to this country for the same reasons that other immigrants have: the pursuit of a better life, the promise of freedom, and so on. Yet at least the first generation of immigrants have often looked back toward their origin as their real "home" and have not fully invested monetarily and emotionally in American political and civic structures. Many immigrant Muslims have led lives of political neutrality and passivity, seeing their primary mission as that of providing for their families. There are, however, signs that this political lethargy is beginning to change in the charged post-9/11 environment, particularly among the second-generation immigrant Muslims.[53] The foremost leader of African American Muslims, Warith Deen Muhammad, is a conservative Republican who is largely uninterested in engaging the critiques of American foreign and domestic policy that many Muslims are invested in. Western Muslims realize that one has no way of transforming a society along the lines of justice without participating in it and remaining engaged with it. Passivity is no longer an option, if it ever was, for American Muslims.

Education

As previously mentioned, there are currently no credible institutions of higher learning for training of Islamic scholars in the United States, although

organizations such as Zaytuna and the International Institute of Islamic Thought are moving in that direction. There are ongoing conversations about a Crescent University to be established outside of New York City. Many of the leading scholars of Islam in America, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and John A. Williams are involved in this ambitious project. It seems clear that this is a necessary step in the further evolution of an American Islamic identity.

American Muslims, like other Americans, are drawn into the controversies over the teaching of religion in public education systems. A vivid recent example was the University of North Carolina controversy in which a translation of the Qur'an (by American scholar Michael Sells) was chosen for a summer reading program.[54] These struggles are not confined to university curricula, and in some ways, the most widespread impact will come from revising junior high and high school offerings. The founder of the Council for Islamic Education, Shabbir Mansuri, recalls how he became involved in these struggles. His daughter's eighth grade social studies textbook included sections on every major world civilization. Whereas the chapter on every culture began with a picture of a historical figure, the chapter on Islam was introduced by a picture of a camel![55] This dehumanizing depiction of Muslims is so widespread that it will take a massive engagement with the system to transform it.

Christian Zionism: the Bastard Offspring of Christian Evangelical Movements and Pro-Zionist Organizations

One of the largest obstacles to the integration of Muslims into American civic and political life is the power and pervasive influence of what has been called Christian Zionism. The usage of this term requires some background explanation. It is far too customary for American Muslims to point to the power of Jewish lobby groups such as AIPAC as part of conspiracy theories. It is equally common for supporters of AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) to describe those who undertake a critical discussion of pro-Zionist political structures in America as anti-Semitic. One has to enter this minefield with caution and clarity.

On one hand, it is important to recognize AIPAC as one of the four or five largest and most powerful lobby groups in Washington, according to the sources as varied as *Fortune* and BBC.[56] This power and prestige from a group that has roughly the same population in America as American Muslims has led to situations of resentment and envy. On the other hand, it is simplistic to imagine that the entire American foreign policy support for Israel is due to the influence of groups like AIPAC. An equally important reason has to be sought in the political emergence of the Evangelical Christian Movement. Depending on the survey that one consults, one-fourth to

one-third of all Americans describe themselves as Evangelical or ‘‘born again’’ Christians. It is in the context of this Evangelical Christianity that an unwavering support for Israel has developed in American Protestantism. In terms of number, funds, and political influence, this voting block vastly dwarfs the impact of groups like AIPAC. It is perhaps one indication of the secular bias of much of the American media that this group by and large goes unexamined (or at least under-examined) in the national media.[57]

In 2006, another episode indicated the extent to which discussions of the extent of the influence of the Israel lobby are contested in the public sphere. A Harvard professor at the Kennedy School of Government, Stephen Walt, working in tandem with a University of Chicago professor, John Mearsheimer, published a lengthy study titled ‘‘The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy.’’ This 82-page study represents one of the lengthiest documentations of the extent to which American foreign policy in the Middle East is shaped by Israeli interests.[58] The fury over the debate—although not so much the particular evidence and the conclusion—is another representation of the taboo nature of this topic. In an ironic twist, the pressure put on Harvard to remove its seal from the paper (an unprecedented move) supports the argument for the power of the Zionist lobby in the United States. A more balanced perspective can be obtained from across the Atlantic, where an English journalist, Geoffrey Wheatcroft wrote:

> The degree to which this has affected American policy, up to and including the war in Iraq, has been discussed calmly by sane British commentators – though also, to be sure, played up maliciously by bigots.
>
> In America, by contrast, there has been an unmistakable tendency to shy away from this subject.[59]

The power and relevance of Christian Zionist groups is underscored by the fact that they were largely responsible for bringing the George W. Bush regime to power. It is no accident that the South and the Midwest, regions that largely voted for Bush in the 2000 elections, are the parts of the country with the largest percentage of self-identifying ‘‘born-again’’ Christians. Furthermore, many prominent members of the administration, including President George W. Bush himself, identify themselves as Evangelical Christians. One such member is former attorney general John Ashcroft, who summed up his views on Islam and Christianity as follows: ‘‘Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him. Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you.’’[60] While many members of the secular media scoffed at President Bush’s evocation of Jesus Christ (at a strategic Republican debate in Des Moines, Iowa) as his ‘‘favorite philosopher,’’ they failed to understand the implication of that signal for the Evangelical voting block.[61]

It is this circle of Evangelical Christianity that is responsible for perhaps the most vigorously pro-Zionist and simultaneously anti-Islamic statements in the American public scene. The two need not be linked, but in today's America they are increasingly emerging from the same corner. Evangelical leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson repeatedly recall that ''The Bible Belt in America is Israel's only safety belt right now.'' Linked to this support for a vision of an exclusive Jewish state in the ''Holy Lands'' (as they prefer to call it) is a distinct hatred of Islam, Arabs, and Muslims. Falwell's ministry has even put together a webpage to spread some vicious and hateful accusations against the Prophet Muhammad and Islam.[62] Some of the tension with Muslims is traceable to medieval theological polemics between Islam and Christianity. More pertinent is the distinct messianic, premillennial theology of Evangelicals who believe that the establishment of the state of Israel is a necessary prequel for the return of the Messiah. The massive popularity of Christian fiction genres such as the ''Left Behind'' series is directly due to this messianic eschatology. This has made for a very strange relationship between Evangelical Christians and largely secular Zionist Jews in their one-sided support for Israel.[63] It is for this reason that I referred to Christian Zionism as a ''bastard'' child. This is no permanent ''marriage,'' but a convenient assignation. Theologically speaking many of the same Evangelical Christians may be guilty of horrendous levels of anti-Semitism. If asked openly, they would recognize Judaism either as an incomplete or a misled religious tradition, since according to their reading of the Bible, ''none shall come to the Father except through Christ.'' Furthermore, according to this Evangelical eschatology, when the Messiah returns, two-third of the Jews will perish. The rest will convert. While many American Jews and Israelis are aware of the bigotry of these Evangelicals, for the time being it has proven convenient to prolong this cooperation to bring ''security'' for the state of Israel (that is, military and foreign aid support, United States vetoing of U. N. resolutions). A joint meeting of Christian and Jewish Zionists in the summer of 2003 declared President Bush's ''road map'' for Palestinians and Israelis to be a breach of God's 4000-year-old covenant with Israel.[64]

It is hard to overemphasize the degree to which this Evangelical component is responsible for creating and maintaining a hostile attack on Islam in America. Franklin Graham is the son of Billy Graham, the famed Crusader (pun intended) who has counseled almost every single American president for five decades. In the weeks after the 9/11 attack, Graham (Jr.) disagreed with Bush (Jr.) over the President's description of Islam as a religion of peace that had been hijacked. Graham instead stated that Islam is an ''evil and wicked religion'' and maintained that any attempts to describe Islam as containing peaceful messages were fundamentally mistaken. It was only much later that President Bush distanced himself from these comments, and even then he did so without referring to Graham by name.[65] Still, Graham delivered the Good Friday sermon in April of 2003 at the Pentagon, which

confirmed the worst Muslim anxieties about the juxtaposition of Evangelical prejudice and arrogant militarism in the Bush administration.[66] Graham speaks for many Evangelicals in this country who do not share President Bush's benevolent, if somewhat simplistic, attitude toward Islam.[67] Nor was Graham's comment the only such statement. The former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Jerry Vines, who is from Jacksonville, Florida (this author's birthplace and hometown), described the Prophet Muhammad as a "demon-possessed pedophile." Vines, who was also the board chairman of Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, went on to repeat typical Evangelical assertions that Muslims worship a different God than Jews and Christians, thus revealing a fundamental misunderstanding of Islamic thought according to both Muslims and most Christian theologians from various denominations.[68] Christianity has had to come to terms with the insidious anti-Semitism that it nurtured for centuries. Now, it will have to reckon with its "new anti-Semitism," Islamophobia.

NATIONALISM OR PATRIOTISM?

Hyper-nationalism and flag waving are entrenched modes of response to both tragedy and war in America.[69] Many American Muslims have participated in this mode, becoming more flag-waving than all the rest in order to protect themselves from charges of serving as a fifth column in this country. Much of the visual imagery put forth by American Muslim organizations—and distributed by mainstream media sources—has consisted of "obviously Muslim" figures (meaning veiled women and bearded immigrant males) carrying the American flag. At least one intended meaning of such symbols is to assure us that Muslims are "just as American" as everyone else in this country.[70]

There are groups of contemporary progressive Muslims who have responded to the above by going over to the other end of the spectrum, one which rejects all nationalist based forms of identity. They see Muslims instead as a part of a global spiritual community (the *Umma*), or simply as human beings whose humanity both precedes and transcends their national identity. These are important means of showing solidarity with all those outside the world hegemon, the United States.

There exists yet another option for American Muslims, especially ones who wish to engage both their Muslimness and in some sense their American affiliation. This distinction is one introduced by other liberal social critics, and seeks to identify a distinction between being patriotic and nationalistic.[71] The majority of American Muslims reject nationalism as a mode of identity politics, since rooted in the very idea of nationalism is affiliation with those members of humanity who happen to be born inside a modern nation-state above and beyond other human beings outside of those borders. For many

Muslims, this form of identity ultimately serves to create an ''us'' versus ''them'' means of identity, one that is ultimately divisive rather than unifying. Patriotism, on the other hand, is a more redeemable term. The term ''patriotic'' is also contested. Some use the term as virtually synonymous with nationalism. For others, it means an unquestioning, unwavering support for the foreign policy of United States, especially in time of war. For them, being patriotic means to ''support the soldiers'' when they are overseas fighting wars. There is, however, another usage of the term that would seek to resort to a type of being American where one is simultaneously invested in being patriotic but feels called to hold America responsible for the highest standard of justice it is capable of. This type of a patriotism is reminiscent of the attitude of civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, who fully recalled the high ideals of the unfulfilled American dream while remaining mindful of the realities of injustice against Native Americans, women, African Americans, and others throughout American history. It is this variety of patriotism that many American Muslims who wish to engage their American-ness as a significant aspect of their multilayered identity call upon.

CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAM MEAN FOR AMERICA?

It is safe to say that the engagement of Islam with America is now entering its critical stage. In the next two generations, both Islam and American society at large will have to change to accommodate each other. At the heart of this emerging relationship is a central set of questions: Will America be an ostensibly (Judeo-)Christian country, whereby other religious communities are merely tolerated? Muslims have pointed out that the term ''tolerance'' has its origin in medieval toxicology and pharmacology, dealing with how much foreign substance and poison a body can tolerate before it dies. For Muslims, as indeed for other pluralistic human beings, there has to be a higher calling than merely *tolerating* those different from us until it kills us! Our challenge is to push America toward what Eck and others tell us it has already become, the ''most pluralistic nation on Earth.'' This America will be more than merely ''Abrahamic,'' since even that wonderful umbrella which brings together Jews, Christians and Muslims still leaves out our Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Jain, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Wiccan, Atheist, and Agnostic friends.

Will this America be one that truly believes in the equal protection of all human beings before the law, or rather will it target disempowered racial, religious, and ethnic minorities? Will civil rights be seen as necessary sacrifices in an ongoing ''war on terrorism,'' or will they be seen as the very foundation of what is worth saving about America itself? Will immigrant Muslims realize that in every civilization where Islam has flourished it has done so through

the interaction of timeless spiritual teachings and timely cultural contexts? Will the highest and most humanistic elements of American culture be blended into the collage of Islamic values? Can American Muslims be a part of the movement to confront the racism, sexism, classism, consumerism, and militarism of American society while upholding the yet unfinished American dream as a noble experiment?

These are open-ended questions, and the answers, as Bob Dylan tells us, "are blowing in the wind."

NOTES

1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xxv.

2. Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, "European Colonialism and the Emergence of Modern Muslim States," in *The Oxford History of Islam,* ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 549–600; Bruce Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

3. The classic statement of this perspective is Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1968).

4. "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," available through http://copia.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/wif.htm.

5. Letter cited in http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/fatw2.htm.

6. From the interview "Muslims have the right to attack America," published in *The Observer*, November 11, 2001. See http://www.observer.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1501,591509,00.html.

7. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/middle_east/1598146.stm. It is worth noting that Bush and Blair are personalized, while Israel remains a state entity. It is as if Al Qaeda members can conceive of a non-Crusader American and British leadership, but Israel is beyond redemption.

8. One such example is that of the group Tikkun, led by Rabbi Michael Lerner: www.tikkun.org.

9. For an example of nonviolent, civil disobedience by a Palestinian Christian, see Mubarak Awad in http://www..org/Media%20Project%202/mpaa1002.html.

10. See the witty cover on Tariq Ali's *The Clash of Fundamentalism,* which shows George W. Bush and Usama Bin Laden morphing into one another.

11. A sympathetic study is Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Free Press, 1995). One critical evaluation is Michael Linds' "The Weird Men Behind George W. Bush's War," http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=article&pubID=1189. Also worth seeing is Gary Leupp's essay exposing the anti-democratic and Neo-Straussian foundations of the Neo-con movement, which is available at http://www.counterpunch.com/leupp05242003.html. Seymour Hersh's exposé in *The New Yorker* is a solid source of journalistic investigation in demonstrating the business interest of Neo-con Richard Perle. See: http://newyorker.com/fact/content/?030317fa_fact.

12. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

13. Edward Said, "Orientalism: An Exchange." [Letter] *New York Review of Books* 29 (13) (August 12, 1982): 44–46. On Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," *New York Review of Books* 29 (11) (June 24, 1982): 49–56. Lewis' reply is on 47–48.

14. The hardback version of *What Went Wrong,* which came out in 2001, bore the subtitle: "Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response." By the time the paperback version came out in 2003, "Middle Eastern" had mysteriously morphed into Islam/Muslim, resulting in: "The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East." Modernity among Muslims is assumed by Lewis to be entirely due to "Western impact."

15. Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and The West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 135; cited in John Trumpbour, "The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of Post-Cold War World Order," in *The New Crusades: Constructing the New Enemy,* eds., Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, 93.

16. Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why so many Muslims deeply resent the West, and why their bitterness will not easily be mollified," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990. Available online at: http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/90sep/rage.htm.

17. Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage."

18. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/july-dec01/powell_9-13.html.

19. By attempting to define through a discussion of the absent item (posited to be present in Western civilization, Lewis follows in the footsteps of anti-Semitic Orientalists like Ernest Renan, who described the "Semitic race" as "recognized almost entirely by negative characteristics. It has neither mythology, nor epic, nor science, not philosophy, nor fiction, nor plastic arts, nor civil life; in everything there is a complete absence of complexity, subtlety or feeling, except for unity." For Renan, both Muslims and Jews belonged to the "Semitic race." Lewis subsumes the Jewish civilization under Western, but the framework remains much the same.

20. Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage."

21. Qur'an 4:135.

22. Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153.

23. Ibid., 153–4.

24. See *Jerusalem Post*, April 30, 2001, interview with Maj.-Gen. Yitzhak Ben-Yisrael, head of military research and development, Israeli Defense Force.

25. One such resolution (A/RES/46/30) of the General Assembly on December 6, 1991, states: "Bearing in mind the consensus reached by the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East would greatly enhance international peace and security, Desirous of building on that consensus so that substantial progress can be made towards establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East, Welcoming all initiatives leading to general and complete disarmament, including in the region of the Middle East, and in particular on the establishment therein of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons,..."

See http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r030.htm Resolution 687 of the UN Security Council (April 3, 1991), in addition to ending the first Gulf war involving Iraq also calls for a nuclear-weapons free Middle East: http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/596/23/IMG/NR059623.pdf?OpenElement.

26. Lewis, *What Went Wrong,* 155.

27. Said, *Orientalism,* 316.

28. Lewis, *What Went Wrong,* 159.

29. Ibid.

30. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (1993): 22–25.

31. I am here (and elsewhere) indebted to the wonderful insights of a dear friend and leading anthropologist, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, who pointed out Huntington's racism in a lecture at Colgate University in Spring 2003.

32. See for example, Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1996), 207–208, 245–265, 266–298, 312.

33. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" 22.

34. It is tempting to note that in the article the Clash was posited as a question mark, whereas by 1996 Huntington was confident enough to remove the question mark and affirm the self-fulfilling prophecy.

35. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 49.

36. One could easily point to many encounters in the realms of science, medicine, philosophy, trade, and so on.

37. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 184–206.

38. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 129.

39. For an excellent study of Muslim Andalusia as a model of pluralism, see Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 2002).

40. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 217.

41. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 217–218.

42. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" 35.

43. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations,* 256.

44. Mottahedeh offered a point by point refutation of Huntington in his "The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist's 'Critique," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 2, 2 (1996): 1–26. This essay has been reprinted in the Emran Qureshi and Michael Sells volume, *The New Crusades.*

45. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2495.

46. Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 2002), 2–3.

47. The classic study here is Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

48. http://www.beliefnet.com/story/54/story_5402_1.html.

49. Very useful here is Bill Moyer's interview with the head of the Center for Public Integrity, at http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_lewis2.html For ACLU's evaluation of the PATRIOT Bill, see http://www.aclu.org/SafeandFree/SafeandFree.cfm?ID=12126&c=207.

50. Center for Public Integrity has obtained a leaked copy of this memo. Among other powers, this bill would grant the Attorney General the power to strip U.S. citizens of their citizenship. See: http://www.publicintegrity.org/dtaweb/downloads/Story_01_020703_Doc_1.pdf.

51. http://www.beliefnet.com/story/50/story_5010_1.html.

52. For a frank discussion of these tensions, see Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

53. Rachel Zoll, AP religion writer, "U.S. Muslims Lobbying for Civil Rights," June 8, 2003. The article can be accessed at: http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/nation/wire/sns-ap-american-muslims,0,2912861.story?coll=sns-ap-nation-headlines.

54. For this controversy, see http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/UNC_ApproachingTheQur'an.htm.

55. As conveyed in the video *Islam in America*, produced by the Christian Science Monitor.

56. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1969542.stm (BBC) and http://www.fortune.com/fortune/power25 (Fortune), which ranks AIPAC as the fourth most powerful lobby group in the United States.

57. One notable exception was a 60 Minutes piece (June 8, 2003). Access at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/10/03/60minutes/main524268.shtml.

58. The paper, minus the JFK Seal which was removed, can be downloaded at: http://ksgnotes1.harvard.edu/Research/wpaper.nsf/rwp/RWP06-011/$File/rwp_06_011_walt.pdf.

59. "Most Favored Nation," http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2006/04/02/most_favored_nation/?page=1.

60. The statement is from an interview with the syndicated columnist Carl Thomas, at http://www.crosswalk.com/news/1108858.html.

61. http://www.cnn.com/1999/ALLPOLITICS/stories/12/15/religion.register/.

62. http://www.falwell.com/historical_data.html.

63. For a historical overview of this complicated relationship, see *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Towards Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865–1945* (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991).

64. "Zionist meeting brands 'road map' as heresy": http://www.washtimes.com/national/20030518-114058-5626r.htm.

65. "Bush Takes on Christian Right Over Anti-Islam Words," http://middleeastinfo.org/article1607.html.

66. http://www5.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/04/18/graham.pentagon/.

67. See for example Bush's comments about Islam inside the Washington Islamic Center (http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/islam/s091701b.htm), and the comments as part of the speech to the joint session of the congress after 9/11(http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/islam/s092001.htm).

68. Susan Sachs, "Baptist Pastor Attacks Islam, inciting cries of Intolerance," *The New York Times,* June 15 (2002).

69. Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

70. This discourse has been advocated by authors ranging from Asma Gull Hasan to Feisal Abdul Rauf.

71. For an insightful commentary, see Bill Moyers http://www.pbs.org/now/commentary/moyers19.html.

INDEX

Abd al-Hakim. *See* Jackson, Sherman A.
Abd-Allah, Umar Faruq, 45–46
'Abd al-Qadir Jilani, 192
Abdul Ghafor, Pir Maulana, 180–81
'Abdul Ghani Munsiff, 185
Abode of the Message, 178, 179
Abu A'la Mawdudi, 15
Abu Bakr (caliph), 9, 150, 176
Abu Bakr al-Kasani, 13
Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi, 7–8
Abu Ghaith, Sulaiman, 200
Abu Hanifa, 12
Abu Hashim Madani, Sayyid Mohammed, 174, 178
Abu Hurayra, 4
Abu Muslim, 152
Abu Talib, 4
Abu Umama, 5, 7
Abu Zayd, 101
Active Intelligence, 30–31
Activists. *See* Muslim Activists
Adam and *Hawa* (Eve), 154
Adultery (*zina*), 151–52
African American Muslims: autonomy, desire for, 57–61; black American–immigrant relations, 46–51, 53–55, 58, 212; common history with South Asian immigrants, 61–63; Islamic heritage, 72–73, 74; Islamic ownership and identity, challenges of, 69–70, 73–74, 75, 78, 80–82; late twentieth century perspective, 80–81; Malcolm X, 44, 46–47; Nation of Islam, 44–46, 54, 62, 74, 79–80; post–Civil War era, 74–77; surnames, 80; terminology for, 69–70, 75
African Muslim slaves, 70, 71–73, 74
Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 152
Ahmadiyya Movement, 49, 65 n.17, 77, 78
AIPAC. *See* American Israel Public Affairs Committee
Al-Alawi, Sidi Abusalam, 181
Al Baji, 10
'Ali (imam), 176; Ramadan group prayer, 6–7
'Ali ibn Abi Talib, 18 n.19, 150
Ali, Noble Drew, 74, 75–77
'Ali Shari'ati, 15
All Churches, 177
Amanpour, Christiane, 211
American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), 213–14
American Muslims: black American–immigrant relations, 46–49, 53–55, 58, 212; demographics, 46, 64 n.15, 210; *ijtihad,* approach to, 16; Malcolm X, 44, 46–47; media depiction of, 210–11, 216; racial considerations, 44–46, 49–51; Sunni Muslims, 47; *Umma,* 43. *See also* African American Muslims; American Sufism; Immigrants; United States
American Society of Muslims (ASM). *See* Warith Deen Mohammed
American Sufism: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Muhammad Raheem, 170, 187–89;

Inayat Khan, Hazrat, 173–79; Lewis, Murshid Samuel Ahmad Murad Chishti, 170, 174, 179–82; Meher Baba, 170, 182–87. *See also* Sufism
Angel Gabriel, 32
Angelus Novus (Klee), 123
Anjumani Listserve, 179
Anti-Americanism. *See* Westernophobia
Anti-Semitism. *See* Islamophobia
Apartheid, 120–21
Apocalyptic theories of progress, 118–20
The Aquarian Conspiracy, 170
Arab immigrants, 48
Arab-Islamic Philosophy (al-Jabri), 27–28
Aristotle: Active Intellect, 29–30; philosophical approach, 25; virtue ethics, 25, 30, 34
Armstrong, Karen, 172
Ashcroft, John, 214
Asian Americans, 48. *See also* South Asian immigrants
Atheistic heresy (*zandaqa*), 1–2, 3–4
The Autobiography of Malcolm X, 44
Autonomy, African American Muslims, 57–61
Averroës. *See* Ibn Rushd, Abu al-Walid
Avicenna. *See* Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali
Avitar Meher Baba. *See* Meher Baba
'Awra (pudenda), 91, 94
Axial Age, 172

"Baba lovers," 170, 187, 192
Bada'i al-Sana'i (al-Kasani), 13
Badawi, Jamal, 98
Badi' (Originator), 2
Bagha (desire), 140, 164 n.13
Baji, 12
Baker, Ora Ray (Amina Begum), 178
Barakat Ali, 181
Barks, Coleman, 170, 188, 189, 190, 192
Bashir, Wali (pseudonym), 50, 51
Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, 170, 191, 193
Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Muhammad Raheem, 170, 187–89, 190, 192
Baydawi, 144
BD' (start or begin something), 2
Beauty, Qur'an on, 166–67 n.41
Begum, Amina (Ora Ray Baker), 178
Benjamin, Walter, 119, 123
Bid'a (innovation/heresy): contemporary context, 15–17; distinguished from *ijtihad,* 10–15; Hadith references to, 5–8; meaning and connotations of, 1–4, 8, 10; Qur'an references to, 4–5; *Sunna* link to, 8–10
Bilal Hyde (imam), 179
Bin Laden, Usama, 15, 200
Birge, John, 173
Black American Muslims. *See* African American Muslims
Black Crescent (Gomez), 75–76
Black Metropolis (Drake and Cayton), 77
Bly, Robert, 190
Body, covering of, 90–91, 92–93, 98
Brunton, Paul, 180
Buddhism, Lewis, Samuel, on, 180
Al-Bukhari, 152
Burqa. See Veils
Bush, George W., 2000 election, 212, 214

Capital punishment for homosexuality, 149–52, 154, 158, 165 n.32
Carlbach, Schlomo, 192–93
Carson, Rachel, 180
Chador. See Veils
Chakras, 191
Chicago: African American population, 49–51, 53–55; business districts, 59; IMAN (Inner City Muslim Action Network), 55–56; South Asian population, 51–55
Chishti, Samuel Ahmad Murad. *See* Lewis, Murshid Samuel Ahmad Murad Chishti
Christians: Evangelical Christians, 213–16; monasticism, 4–5;

philosophical discourse, 26–27; progressive Muslims, association with, 122
Christian Zionism, 213–16
Church of All, 177
Civil Rights Act, 75
Civil Rights Movement, 80, 170
Clara Muhammad, 62, 67 n.57
"Clash of civilizations," 202, 204–5, 207–8
Clash of Civilizations (Huntington), 208
Collected Works (Inayat Khan), 173
Compulsion in marriage (*jabr*), 92
Connectionism, 33
Contracts: marriage, 88–90; *mu'amalat* (social/contractual acts), 86–87, 91, 92–93, 94, 158
Corbin, Henry, 34, 178
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, 54
Counter culture, influence on Interspiritual Age, 170
Creation, Nation of Islam, 74, 79
Creativity. *See Bid'a*
Crescent University project, 213
The Crisis of Islam (Lewis), 201
"Crusader-Zionist" conspiracy, 200, 218 n.7

Al-Dabbusi, 12
Dalai Lama, 179
Dances of Universal Peace, 181, 182, 192
Dancing, Dervish Dances, 181
Da'wa (invitation): Black American–immigrant relations, 53–55; Qur'an on, 54, 66 n.38
De Anima (Aristotle), 29–30
The Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom (Ibn Rushd), 35
Demonstrative reasoning, 36
DePaul University, 55–56
Dervish Dances, 181
Desi immigrants, 48
Dhikr, 178, 187, 191, 192
Dialectical reasoning, 36
Dibliz (in-between space), 128
Disposition (*shakila*), 138, 155, 156, 161, 162
Diversity, 131; Qur'an on, 135, 163 n.6
Divine names, 2, 17 n.2
Divorce: Modernist (Neo-Traditionalist) discourse on, 97, 99–100; traditional *fiqh* views of, 90
Douglas-Kloz, Saadi Neil, 182
Dress: African Muslim slaves, 71; veils, 90–91, 92–93, 98, 105 n.17, 105–6 n.22
Duce, Ivy, 185

Eastern traditions. *See* Orientalism
Ecology, in New Age Movement, 170–71, 191
Education, Islamic studies, 17, 212–13
Egypt, 158
Elijah Muhammad, 62–63, 74, 75
Eliot, T.S., 119, 124
The End of History and the Last Man (Fukuyama), 118–19
Environmentalism. *See* Ecology
Ephraim Bahar Cultural Center, 53
Esack, Farid, 122
Esoteric School (Sufism), 177
The Essential Rumi (Barks), 190
Ethics: marital issues, 97; philosophy and, 25, 30; sexuality and, 157–60
Ethnicity. *See* Race/ethnic considerations
Ethnic mosques, 47, 65 n.18
Evangelical Christians, 213–16
Evolution of the soul, 184

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. *See* Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din
Fakhruddin, Pir, 178
Falwell, Jerry, 215
Family law, 96, 104
Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr, 26, 30, 31–32, 34
Farad Muhammad, 62
Farming, in Sufism, 178
Fatwa(s), Internet, 154, 160, 166 n.39

"Fault lines" between civilizations, 207–8
Feminism, 100–103, 107 n.50; influence on Interspiritual Age, 170. *See also* Gender roles
Ferguson, Marilyn, 170
Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence): Muslim progressives and, 121; as source of law, 86; traditional interpretations, 87–91, 93–95
First Axial Age, 172
First Pittsburgh Mosque, 78
Fitna (chaos), 94
Fitra (inner conscience), 139, 155, 156, 161, 162
Food: African Muslim slaves, 71; vegetarianism, 189
Freud, Sigmund, 165–66 n.34
Fukuyama, Francis, 118–19
Fundamentalists. *See* Muslim Activists

Gabriel, Angel of Revelation. *See* Angel Gabriel
Gardening/farming, in Sufism, 178
Gaze/looking at women, 91
Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles (Badawi), 98
Gender roles: gender balance (Neo-Traditionalist) discourse, 95–100, 102; gender equality (Reformist) discourse, 100–103; legal rulings, 87; patriarchal juristic interpretations, 86, 91–95, 96–100, 105 n.18, 134; Qur'an on, 105 n.20, 134–35; traditional *fiqh* interpretations, 87–91, 93–95
Genetic inheritance patterns (*tabi'a*), 138
Al-Ghazali: condemnation of Peripateticism, 23, 28, 35–37, 38; on marriage, 88; value of in-between space (*dibliz*), 128
Ghazi, Abidullah, 51–52, 58, 59, 63
Ghazi, Tasneema, 52
Gnosis, 173
Gnosticism, 27–28
God Speaks (Meher Baba), 183–85
Graham, Franklin, 215–16
Greek philosophy: influence on Islamic philosophy, 24, 25–27, 31, 34, 37–38, 208; intelligible *vs.* sensible objects, 31; relationship of theory and practice, 29. *See also* Aristotle
Green, Michael, 188, 189, 190, 192
Griffiths, Bede, 171–72
Guardianship, 92

Hadith: *bid'a,* references to, 5–8; *isnad* and *matn* criticism, 150; punishments for homosexuality, 149–52, 154, 165 n.32; women as transmitters of, 93
Hadot, Pierre, 24–25, 27
Hafiz-i Shurazj, 183, 185
Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), of Malcolm X, 44
Hanafi school of law, 132; on homosexuality, 153, 154
Haqiqa (truth), 173, 176
Head coverings, veils, 90–91, 92–93, 98, 105 n.17, 105–6 n.22
Healing Order (Sufism), 177, 191
Herder, Johann Gottfried von, 119
Heresy: *bid'a,* 1–4, 8, 10; al-Ghazali's accusation of Peripatetics, 35–37, 38; *zandaqa,* 1–2, 3–4
Hermetico-Pythagoreans, 29
Hijab. *See* Veils
Hinduism: New Age Movement and, 171, 172, 190, 192; syncretism with Islam, 98, 172
Hispanic immigrants, 48, 210
Homosexuality: as adultery (*zina*), 151–52; ethical considerations, 157–60; innate personality and, 136–39, 155, 156, 160–62; Lot, narrative of, 141–43; marriage or civic unions, 153–55, 160; origin and use of term, 147, 164 n.21; punishment for, 149–52, 154, 158, 165 n.32; Qur'an on, 146–47; *Shari'a* interpretations, 145–53
Hope Project, 178
Huntington, Samuel, 207–10

'Ibadat (ritual/spiritual acts), 86–87, 91, 92–93, 94, 158
Ibadi Islam, 18 n.19; condemnation of innovation, 5–6, 8–9
Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, 7, 9
Ibn al-Qayyim, 13, 54
Ibn 'Arabi, 154–55
Ibn Hajar, 6, 10
Ibn Rushd, Abu al-Walid (Averroës), 35–37, 132
Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali (Avicenna): Active Intellect, 32–33; philosophical approach, 29; prophetology, 30, 32–33, 34
Ibrahim, Anwar, 158
Ijtihad (independent reasoning): contemporary context, 15–17; distinguished from *bid'a,* 10–13; historical perspective, 14–15; need for (on homosexuality), 153–54, 159; rationale for, 87
Imam, as living exemplar, 34
Imami (Twelver) Shi'ism: Ramadan group prayer, 7; *Sunna–bid'a* (innovation/heresy) paradigm, 8
Imam Zaid Shakir, 47
IMAN. *See* Inner City Muslim Action Network
Immigrants: black American–immigrant relations, 46–49, 53–55, 58, 212; demographics, 46, 64 n.15, 210; Hispanic, 210; historical perspective, 77–79
Immigration Act of 1965, 47
Inayat, Himayati, 177
Inayat Khan, Pir-O Mushid Hazrat, 169–70, 173–79, 181, 190, 191, 192
Inayat Khan, Pir Vilayat, 170, 174, 178–79, 182, 193
Inayat Khan, Pir Zia, 177, 179
The Incoherence of the Incoherence (Ibn Rushd), 37
The Incoherence of the Philosophers (al-Ghazali), 35
India, 148. *See also* South Asian immigrants
Indonesia, 148, 172
Inner City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), 55–56
Innovation: *bid'a,* 1–4, 8, 10; Ramadan group prayer, 6–8, 12
Intention, 139
International Institute of Islamic Thought, 213
International Sufi Order, 174
Internet: *fatwas,* 154, 160, 166 n.39; influence on Interspiritual Age, 170
Interspiritual Age, 169–72, 188, 190–93
Involution of the soul, 184
Iqbal, Muhammad, 119–20
IQRA International Educational Foundation, 51, 52
Iran, gender roles, 100, 102
Isfahani, 144
Islam: conversion to, 4, 54–55, 210; cultural significance of, 45; diversity and geographical dispersion, 43; as "failed Christianity," 70, 73–74; four dimensions of, 172–73; syncretism with Interspiritual thinking, 172, 190–93; syncretism with Sufism, 175; *Umma,* 43. *See also* African American Muslims; American Muslims; Muslims; Progressive Islam
Islam and the Blackamerican (Jackson), 46
Islamic law, *ijtihad* traditions, 10–13
Islamic philosophy: influence of Greek philosophy on, 24, 25–27; prophetology and, 30–35; relationship to religion, 23, 27; scholarly views of, 24–30; spiritual exercises, 24, 25, 28–30, 32, 36
Islamic revivalism groups, 117
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), 58
Islamophobia: Huntington, Samuel, 207–10; Lewis, Bernard, 201–6
ISNA. *See* Islamic Society of North America
Isnad (narrators), 150

Israel, 206; Christian Zionism, 213–16; Palestinian-Israeli conflict, 200–201, 215

Jablonski, Carl, 182
Al-Jabri, Muhammad Abed, 27–28
Jackson, Sherman A. (Abd al-Hakim), 46
Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, 13, 54
Jesus: appearance to Lewis, Samuel, 180; monasticism, 4–5
Jews: American, 211; progressive Muslims, association with, 122; Sufism, association with, 193; Zionist, 215
Jihad (struggle; social justice): Bawa Muhaiyadeen on, 189; meaning of term, 11; Muslim interpretations of, 200
Johnson, John, 177
Judaism, philosophical tradition, 27
Jurisprudence: contradictory opinions, 11–12; gender roles, interpretations of, 86, 91–95; homosexuality, views of, 145–53; *ijtihad* traditions, 10–13; *Sunna–bid'a* (innovation/heresy) paradigm, 8–10
Jurists, women as, 106 n.23
Justice, Qur'an on, 166–67 n.41

Kadivar, Mohsen, 102
Kalam (theology), 128; Christian, 27; Muslim progressives and, 121
Kalima, 190
Kalu Rinpoche, 179
Khalid ibn Walid, 150
Al-Khidr (prophet), 180
Khomeini, Ruhollah (ayatollah), 15, 122
Khul' (divorce), 90
King, Martin Luther, 217
Kinship Concentration (Sufism), 178
Klee, Paul, 123
Koselleck, Reinhart, 125

Lacan, Jacques, 165–66 n.34
Latinos, 48, 210
Latour, Bruno, 125
Leaman, Oliver, 26, 28
Lebanon, 148
Legal rulings: family law, 96, 104; types of, 86–87. *See also* Jurisprudence
Legal schools: contradictory opinions, 11–12; *ijtihad* traditions, 10–13
Legal sources, 86, 104 n.4, 132
Lesbian women, 143–45, 146–47
Lewis, Bernard, 201–6
Lewis, Murshid Samuel Ahmad Murad Chishti, 170, 174, 179–82, 192, 193
Lewis, Shakir (pseudonym), 55
Lincoln, E. Eric, 70
Liwata (sodomy), 148
Lot (prophet), 141–43
Lust (*shahwa*), 140

Madyun, Abdullah (imam), 49–51, 54–55, 61
Malcolm X, 44, 46–47
Malik ibn Anas (imam), 151–52
Manichaeans, 3, 17–18 n.8
Mansuri, Shabbir, 213
Ma'rifat (inner discernment), 173, 176
Marriage: adultery (*zina*), 151–52; classical views of, 88–90, 105 n.11; juristic interpretations, 92; Modernist (Neo-Traditionalist) discourse on, 97; of orphans, 145; between same-sex partners, 153–55, 159–60
Martin, Ada (Rabia), 174, 176, 185
Marvels of Things Devised (al-Kasani), 13
Masjid (mosque), ethnic mosques, 47, 65 n.18
Masnawi/Mathnawi (Rumi), 189–90
Mating relationships, 154–55, 159–60
Matn (textual content), 150
Al-Maturidi, 132, 134
Maududi (Mawdudi), Maulana Abdul A'la, 98, 122
Mearsheimer, John, 214
Media: depictions of Muslims, 210–11, 216; effect on classical authority, 14;

influence on Interspiritual Age, 170; secular bias of, 214
Medina, 6
Meditation, 178, 182, 186, 191, 192
Meher Baba, 170, 182–87, 190, 192
Men, *ghayra* (men's sexuality), 93–94
Metaphysics of the Healing (Ibn Sina), 32–33
Minimalism, doctrine of, 4
Modernists. *See* Muslim Modernists
Mohammed, W.D. *See* Warith Deen Mohammed
Monasticism, 4–5
Moorish Science Temple, 76–77, 78
Morality. *See* Ethics
Morewedge, Parviz, 33
Moroccan family code, 104
Mottahedeh, Roy, 209
Mu'amalat (social/contractual acts), 86–87, 91, 92–93, 94, 158
Muhammad: appearance to Lewis, Samuel, 180; Bawa Muhaiyaddeen on, 188–89; on *bid'a* (innovation), 6; Inayat Khan on mission of, 175–76; minimalism, doctrine of, 4; prophetic inspiration of, 31
Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, 88–89
Mujtihad, 12–13
Murad, Ahmad. *See* Lewis, Murshid Samuel Ahmad Murad Chishti
Murder, 6, 8
Murids (disciples), 177, 182
Murshids (spiritual guides), 173, 174, 177, 185
Murshid Sam. *See* Lewis, Murshid Samuel Ahmad Murad Chishti
Muslim Activists, 209; *ijtihad,* approach to, 14; IMAN (Inner City Muslim Action Network), 55–56
Muslim American Society (MAS). *See* Warith Deen Mohammed
Muslim charities, suspicion of links to Al Qaeda, 57
Muslim Modernists: gender balance, discourse on, 95–100; *ijtihad,* approach to, 14; inevitability of progress theory, 118–20
Muslim Public Affairs Committee, 212
Muslims: Islamophobia, 201–10; media depiction of, 210–11, 216; South African, 120–22; Western culture, views of, 199–201. *See also* African American Muslims; American Muslims
Musnad (Ahmad in Hanbal), 152
Mutahhari, Murteza, 98, 99–100
Al-Muwatta (Malik ibn Anas), 151–52

Nafaqa (maintenance), 90
Nahas, Muhammad Omar, 137
Nashashibi, Rami, 56–57, 63
Nasr, Seyyed Hossein: Crescent University project, 213; prophetology, 34, 38; spiritual exercises, 28–30
Nationalism, 216–17
Nation of Islam, 49, 74, 79–80; *da'wa* (invitation), 54; Malcolm X and, 44; origin of, 62; resistance to racism, 45, 47
Native Americans, 48
Nature: Qur'an on, 191; as scripture, 175
Nawawi, 6
Neo-Traditionalists: gender balance, discourse on, 95–100, 102; homosexuality, views of, 137, 148–49
New Age Movement, 169–72, 188–89, 190–93
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 129
Nizam al-Din Awliya, 132–33
Noble Drew Ali. *See* Ali, Noble Drew
Nonreproductive sexual intercourse, 144
North Carolina, University of, 213
Nyogen Senzaki, 180

Omega Institute, 178
Orientalism, 26–28, 202
Orphans, marriage of, 145
Palestinian-Israeli conflict, 200–201, 206, 215

Parda/purdah. See Veils
Patriarchy: gender roles, interpretations of, 86, 94, 96–97, 105 n.18, 134; sexuality and sexual orientation, interpretation of, 134–35, 143, 145–46, 152–53
PATRIOT Bill, 212
Patriotism, 217
Peace Movement, influence on Interspiritual Age, 170
Perfect Man, 181
Peripateticism, 29–30; cultivation of virtues, 37; al-Ghazali condemnation of, 35–37, 38; prophetology and, 30–35, 37. *See also* Aristotle
Persecution and the Art of Writing (Strauss), 26–27
Personality: homosexuality and, 136–37; levels of, 137–39, 155–56, 157, 162; phases of the soul, 160–62
Philosophy: approaches to, 23–30; relationship to religion, 23, 27. *See also* Islamic philosophy
Philosophy as a Way of Life (Hadot), 24–25, 27
Pir Fakhruddin, 178
Plato, 29, 31
Pluralism, 131, 159, 205, 208–9, 217
The Political State (al-Farabi), 31
Politics, American Muslim participation in, 212
Polygyny, 90, 99, 105 n.16, 145
Poole, Elijah. *See* Elijah Muhammad
Powell, Colin, 203
Prabhu, Manik, 174
Prayer. *See Salat*
Pre-Islamic period: *bid'a,* concept of, 2–3; marriage, 92
The Principle of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy (Yazdi), 31
Progressive Islam: approaches and possibilities, 126–29; capital punishment, 158; concept and terminology, 115–18; evolution of history and progress, 118–20, 123; morality and, 157; nationalism, rejection of, 216; South African experience, 120–22; traditionalism and inherited knowledges, 123–26
Prophetology, 30–35
Prophets, Active Intellect and, 33
Protestants. *See* Evangelical Christians
Psychiatry: clinical approaches to sexual orientation, 136–37, 139; Sufism and, 182
Psychology, in New Age Movement, 171, 191
Pudenda (*'awra*), 91, 94
Punishment for homosexuality, 149–52, 154, 158, 165 n.32
Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam (Maududi), 98

Al Qaeda, 57, 200, 203
Al-Qarafi, 12–13
Qawwal, 181
Qur'an: *bid'a,* references to, 2, 4–5; on *da'wa* (invitation), 54, 66 n.38; on diversity, 135, 163 n.6; on gender roles, 105 n.20, 134–35; on mating relationships, 154–55, 159–60; on personality, 137–39, 155; phases of the soul, 160–62; progressive Muslims and, 122; sexuality and sexual orientation, 139–45, 146–47, 154–55, 159–60; on slavery, 72; spiritual exemplars, 34; university studies of, 213
Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism (Esack), 122
Qutb al-aqtab. See Meher Baba
Qutb, Sayyid, 15, 122

Rabia (Martin), 174, 176, 185
Race/ethnic considerations: black American–immigrant relations, 46–51, 53–55, 58, 212; Islamophobia, 201–10; racial profiling, 53, 57; South Africa, 120–22. *See also* African American Muslims; Immigrants
Ramadan, group prayer during, 6–8, 12

Ramadan, Mikal (imam), 59–61
Rami Nashashibi, 56–57, 63
Rape, 141–43
Raphaelite Work, 177
Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din, 140
Reasoning: knowledge of religion, 133; types of, 36
Reincarnation, 184
Religion (*din*), knowledge of, 133
Resurrection of bodies, 35
Revelation, 175–76
Revival of the Religious Sciences (al-Ghazali), 88
Rhetorical reasoning, 36
Rice, Condoleezza, 207
Rida, Rashid, 144
Rights, marital, 89–90
Ritualistic matters: *bid'a* and, 9; *'ibadat* (ritual/spiritual acts), 86–87, 91, 92–93, 94, 158
Robertson, Pat, 215
Rumi, Mevlana Jalaluddin, 170, 183–84, 189–90

Sachedina, 93, 94
Sa'idzadeh, Mohsen, 102
Salahuddin, Imam Sultan, 53–54, 58
Salat (prayer): African Muslim slaves, 71–72; covering of body during, 91, 92–93; Ramadan group prayer, 6–8, 12; Sufism and, 176, 187, 189, 191, 192
Al-Samarqandi, Fatima bint Muhammad, 13
Sayyid Qutb, 15, 122
Schacter-Shalomi, Zalman, 193
Scholars. *See* Jurists
Schools of law, on homosexuality, 153–54
Science, in New Age Movement, 170
Seclusion of women, 91, 92–93, 97–98
Second Axial Age, 172. *See also* Interspiritual Age
Segregation of women, 91, 97–98
Serres, Michel, 125
Sexuality and sexual orientation: ethical considerations, 157–60; *ghayra* (men's sexuality), 93–94; innate personality and, 136–39, 155, 156, 160–62; nonreproductive sexual intercourse, 144; patriarchal interpretations of, 134, 143, 145–46, 152–53; in Qur'an, 139–45, 146–47, 154–55; *Shari'a* interpretations, 145–53; of women, 93–94, 99, 106 n.37, 143–44, 146–47. *See also* Homosexuality
Shabda Khan, 182
Shahada, 187, 190
Shahwa (lust), 140
Shakila (disposition), 138, 155, 156, 161, 162
Shakir Lewis (pseudonym), 55
Shaku Soyen, 180
Shari'a: as dimension of Islam, 172–73; Inayat Khan on, 191; legal basis for, 102; patriarchal interpretations of, 86, 94, 96–97, 105 n.18, 145–46, 152–53; progressive Muslims and, 121; punishment and, 149–52, 157–58; on sexuality, 145–53, 159; as stage of Sufism, 176; *vs.* social norms, 103, 148, 152–53
Shatabi, 9
Shemsuddin Ahmad, 182
Shereef, Pir Dewal, 181
Al-Shifa (Ibn Sina), 32–33
Shiite Islam, 18 n.19, 19 n.36; condemnation of innovation, 5–7, 8; *ijtihad* traditions, 12; imam, as living exemplar, 34; on lesbianism, 145; philosophy, pursuit of, 28
Sidi Khalil, 89
Silent Spring (Carson), 180
SIRS. *See* Sufi Ruhaniat Islamia Society
Al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya (al-Farabi), 31
Slavery: African Muslim slaves, 70, 71–73; marriage compared to, 88–89; Qur'an on, 72
Social equity, Islamic emphasis on, 64 n.10, 103
Social norms: homosexuality and, 148, 152–53; as rationale for subjugation of women, 93–94, 103

Social transformation. *See* Interspiritual Age
Sodom and Gomorrah, 141–43, 150–51
Sodomy (*liwata*), 148
Sogaku Shaku, 180
Soroush, Abdolkarim, 101–2, 104 n.4, 107 n.44
Soul, phases of, 160–62, 184
Soulwork, 182
South Africa, progressive Islam, 120–22
South Asian immigrants, 210; business success of, 51, 59, 60–61; common history with African American Muslims, 61–63; perspectives of, 51–53; racial profiling of, 53, 57; separation from black Muslims, 48, 49–51, 54–55
Spiritual exercises, 24, 25, 28–30, 32, 36
Spirituality, in New Age Movement, 171
SRI. *See* Sufi Ruhaniat International
St. Denis, Ruth, 181
Strauss, Leo, 26–27
A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty (Inayat Khan), 173, 174–75
Sufi Ruhaniat International (SRI), 182, 193
Sufi Ruhaniat Islamia Society (SIRS), 182, 193
Sufism: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Muhammad Raheem, 170, 187–89, 190, 192; correlation of Islam and Interspiritual thinking, 173, 175, 190–93; Dervish dances, 181; five concentrations, 177–78; four stages of, 176; imam, as living exemplar, 34; Inayat Khan, 169–70, 173–79, 181, 190, 191, 192; Lewis, Murshid Samuel, 170, 174, 179–82, 192, 193; Meher Baba, 170, 182–87, 190–91, 192
Sufism Reoriented, 185, 192
Al-Suhrawardi, Shihab al-Din, 29
Suicide (Zahir al-Din), 148–49
Sultan Salahuddin (imam), 53–54, 58
Sultan, Talat, 52–53
Suluk Academy of Sufi Studies, 179
Sunna: bid'a, link to, 2–3, 8; spiritual exemplars, 34
Sunni Islam, 18 n.19, 19 n.36; condemnation of innovation, 5–6, 8; *ijtihad* traditions, 12–13; Malcolm X and, 44; Sunni African American Muslims, 47
Sura (form; outward appearance), 137–38, 155, 156, 157, 162
Syncretism, of Islam and Interspiritual thinking, 172, 173, 190–93
System of Women's Rights in Islam (Mutahhari), 98

Tabi'a (genetic pattern), 138, 155, 156, 161, 162
Talaq (divorce), 90
Tamkin (sexual access), 90
Tariqa ("the path"), 172–73, 176, 191
Tawhid (oneness of God), 191
Ta'wil (interpretation), 36–37
Teasdale, Wayne, 171, 191
Temperament. *See* Personality
Theft, 157, 166 n.35
TMC (The Mosque Cares). *See* Warith Deen Mohammed
Theology (*kalam*): Christian, 27; Muslim progressives and, 121
Theses on the Philosophy of History (Benjamin), 123
Tolerance, 191, 217
Traditionalism, in progressive Islam, 123–26
Tunisia, 96
Turkey, 96, 148
Tuveson, Ernest Lee, 119

'Umar (caliph): minimalism, doctrine of, 4; Ramadan group prayer, 6–8, 12; *Sunna,* transmission to, 8–9
Umma, 43
United States: Constitutional Amendments, 74–75; demographics,

64 n.15; immigrants, 46–49, 53–55, 58, 77–79, 210; Islamophobia, 201–10; Muslim views of, 199–201; universities, Islamic studies, 17, 212–13. *See also* African American Muslims; American Muslims
Universal Worship (Sufism), 177
Universities: approach to *ijtihad,* 16–17; Islamic studies, 17, 212–13
University of North Carolina, 213

Vegetarianism, 189
Veils, 90–91, 92–93, 98, 105 n.17, 105–6 n.22
Vina, 174
Vines, Jerry, 216
Virtue ethics, 25, 30, 34

Wahdat al-shuhud (experience of oneness), 173, 174
Wahdat al-wujud (unity of existence), 173, 174, 191
Walt, Stephen, 214
Walzer, Richard, 25–26, 31
Warith Deen Mohammed (WDM; imam), 49, 58, 65 n.29, 212
Waterhouse, Frida, 182
Webb, Muhammad Alexander Russell, 77
Western colonialism, 200
Western influence, on family and gender issues, 95–96
Westernophobia, 199–201, 204
What Went Wrong (Lewis), 201, 205–6
Wheatcroft, Geoffrey, 214
Williams, John A., 213
Wisdom, acquisition of, in Greek philosophy, 24, 34
Wolfowitz, Paul, 207
Women: *haya* (women's sexuality), 93–94; *ijtihad* traditions, 13; as jurists, 106 n.23; segregation and seclusion, 91; sexuality of, 94, 99, 106 n.37, 143–44, 146–47; as transmitters of hadith, 93; veils, 90–91, 92–93, 98, 105 n.17, 105–6 n.22
Works Progress Administration, 72

Yazdi, Mehdi Ha'eri, 31

Zahir al-Din, Maulana, 148–49
Zakat, 61
Zandaqa (heresy), 1–2, 3–4
Al-Zawahiri, Ayman, 15, 200
Zaydi school of law, Ramadan group prayer, 7
Zaytuna, 213
Zina (adultery), 151–52
Zindiq (heretic/atheist), 3
Zionism, 215; Christian Zionism, 213–16; "Crusader-Zionist" conspiracy, 200, 218 n.7; of Lewis, Bernard, 206
Ziraat Concentration (Sufism), 178

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